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ABSTRACT

This collection presents 15 articles on writing, three of them new and 12 of them representing the best of the 500 articles published since 1974 in "SET: Research Information for Teachers," a twice-yearly publication by the New Zealand and Australian Councils for Educational Research aimed at teachers, students, board members, and interested parents. The articles in the collection discuss acquisition and development, teaching issues, assessment, and standards. Following a contents sheet (and corresponding to the item numbers, as listed on the contents page) the 15 articles and their authors are as follows: (2) "Writing in Schools: Introduction" (David Philips); (3) "Kids Can Write the First Week in School" (Mary Ellen Giacobbe); (4) "Spelling Genius at Work" (Richard Gentry); (5) "Six Weeks Writing in Two Secondary School Classrooms" (David Philips); (6) "Grammar" ("A Working Knowledge" by Katy Simmonds and "Does Instruction in English Grammar Improve Writing Skills?" by Warwick Elley and others); (7) "Encouraging Writing" (David Philips); (8) "Writing with Word Processors" (Ilana Snyder); (9) "Owning Your Own Writing" (David Philips); (10) "Unlocking the Great Secret" (Graeme Withers); (11) "Staging Points in Personal Narrative" (Irene Farmer and John Dixon); (12) "Evaluating Writing" (David Philips); (13) "Evaluation of the Process of Writing" (Judy Parr); (14) "Writers at Risk" (Carol Adler); (15) "Learning and Teaching Writing" (Hilary Lamb); and (16) "Taking Care of the Elements" (Claire Woods). (SR)

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Writing

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Contents

set: *Research Information for Teachers* is published twice a year by the New Zealand and Australian Councils for Educational Research. Each ***set*** contains 14 or 15 separate items on research, written for teachers, students, Board members, and interested parents.

From the 500 items in ***set*** since 1974, the best 12 on Writing have been selected. Added to these are 3 new items appearing for the first time, and an introduction by the editor of this special edition, David Philips.

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1. Contents Sheet
Make copies and pass them on to interested people.

2. Introduction
David Philips
A short essay on where world-wide research has got to, and on the relevance of the research in this *Best of* ***set***: *Writing*.

Acquisition and Development

3. Kids Can Write the First Week in School
Mary Ellen Giacobbe
A simple question or two, some careful noting down, and this teacher had very useful, and exciting, research results about her own class of 6-year-olds. An example of research every teacher can do. From ***set*** No. 2, 1981.

4. Spelling Genius at Work
Richard Gentry
A fascinating account of the development of a child's written language from 4-years-old to 10. Glenda Bissex's book, *GNYS AT WRK* is enthusiastically reviewed. From ***set*** No. 2, 1983.

5. Six Weeks Writing in Two Secondary School Classrooms
David Philips
By regular interviews of children and teachers, by collecting samples of work, by visiting classes in English, Science, Social/Economic Studies, a picture was built up of writing across the curriculum. From ***set*** No. 1, 1986.

Teaching Issues

6. Grammar
Two short pieces

6a. A Working Knowledge
Katy Simmonds
An investigation of how well 12-year-olds understand the difference between spoken and written language. Despite having no grammatical vocabulary, they have an excellent working knowledge. A new item.

6b. Does Instruction in English Grammar Improve Writing Skills?
Warwick Elley, Ian Barham, Hilary Lamb, Malcolm Wyllie
Three contrasting approaches to grammar were used, over three years, in separate matching classes in a large secondary school. From ***set*** No. 1, 1975.

7. Encouraging Writing
David Philips
A smorgasbord of techniques, all based on research, with explanations, practical advice and lots of references for further reading and study. From ***set*** No. 2, 1983.

8. Writing with Word Processors
Ilana Snyder
The computer's impact on writing quality, on the composing process, and on classroom interactions, all researched with 13-year-olds using both word processors and traditional pen and paper. A new item.

9. Owning Your Own Writing
David Philips
Sixty teachers from the earliest classes in primary school to the top of the secondary school helped in this project which looked at how the most successful teachers of writing got such good work from their pupils. From ***set*** No. 2, 1989.

10. Unlocking the Great Secret
Graeme Withers
Here is an article about maths teaching! In this case the techniques of PROCESS WRITING are used to help both children and teachers understand how thinking solves problems. From ***set*** No. 2, 1989.

Assessment

11. Staging Points in Personal Narrative
Irene Farmer and John Dixon
Studying 8- to 13-year-olds' writing over a year revealed certain features which appeared again and again. These have been set out as 'staging points', stages to look out for as children's abilities develop. Lots of good examples. From ***set*** No. 1, 1986.

12. Evaluating Writing
David Philips
What are the best marking techniques? Day-to-day course-work writing and end-of-term assessments are distinguished and a thorough examination of the most useful and accurate techniques is made, including a checklist of important points. From ***set*** No. 1, 1982.

13. Evaluation of the Process of Writing
Judy Parr
How you assess partly depends on your notion of what writing is for. But the accuracy of the assessment depends on clearly distinguishing different characteristics, from planning to sensitivity. From ***set*** No. 2, 1991.

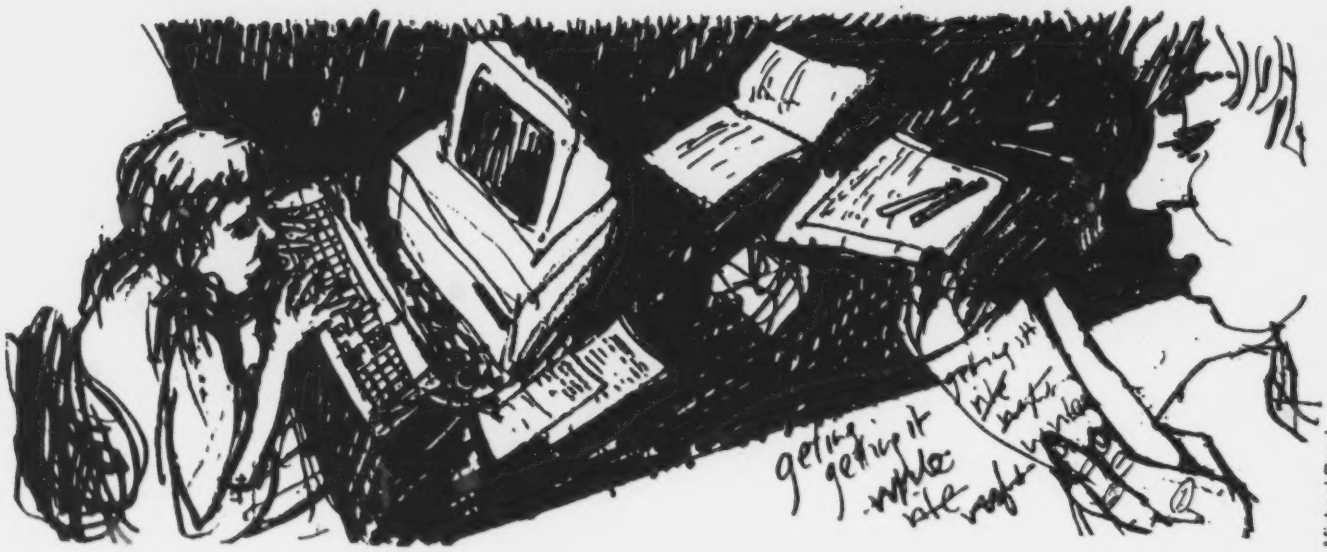
14. Writers At Risk
Carol Adler
Some children of average intelligence fall further and further behind in writing. How can they be identified? Here, spelt out in detail, is an assessment method which helps identify strengths and weaknesses. From ***set*** No. 1, 1987.

Standards

15. Learning and Teaching Writing
Hilary Lamb
In New Zealand in 1984 six thousand children wrote letters, stories, arguments and reflections for the IEA programme. The analysis gives more than a place in some sort of international academic Olympics – it is a fascinating picture of the children themselves. And it helps us match techniques and goals. From ***set*** No. 1, 1989.

16. Taking Care of the Elements
Claire Woods
In South Australia the performance of 11- and 12-year-olds as readers and writers is being assessed in a project called WRAP. The first results from the Writing section – on writing performance, on curriculum, and on teaching and learning – are here surveyed. A new item.

WRITING IN SCHOOLS:



Michael Reed

A SURVEY OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

By David Philips
New Zealand Ministry of Education

Introduction

More than ever, writing is a prerequisite to a fully functioning life in the 1990s. As the articles in this collection make clear, writing is an essential skill, an integral part of the information age; it assists personal development and intellectual growth, is essential for social purposes, and is a key method of learning in every subject. It is also, despite the prevalence of short-answer tests, the principal means for assessing performance at school. Many of these themes are taken up by the contributors to *Best of* ***set:*** *Writing*.

This collection includes papers from authors in several countries. Some of the articles have been published previously in ***set*** after earlier publication elsewhere, while others have been specially prepared for *Best of* ***set:*** *Writing*. Most of the items are by New Zealand or Australian writers, with additional material from the United States and Great Britain. These pieces cover a wide age range, from beginning writers' knowledge of words (*see* Gentry's and Giacobbe's articles) through the primary school (e.g., Adler, Farmer and Dixon, Withers, and Woods) to the secondary school level (e.g., Elley, Philips, and Snyder). The main focus is on teaching and learning, including an item on writing with a word processor (Snyder). Several articles are concerned with different forms of assessment (Adler, Lamb, Parr, Philips, and Woods), ranging from national or regional surveys (Lamb, Woods) through to intensive diagnostic monitoring of individual writers (Adler, Parr). Most items address topics of interest to both primary and secondary teachers.

Key Ideas

During the 1980s, teachers of writing have encountered various issues. Perhaps the two most consuming ones have been the 'process versus product' debate and the issue of standards. The development of writing, the composing process, the use of computers for writing, and writing-across-the-curriculum have also become more important over the past decade, and each of these themes is taken up in this collection.

The 'process/product' debate concerns the extent to which students should be encouraged to generate their 'own' writing compared with creating grammatically correct products. Advocates of the process approach towards teaching writing, such as Graves, claim that students learn to write best if they are encouraged to focus upon discrete stages in the writing process, inventing, planning, drafting, rewriting, proofreading and publishing, and have a large degree of control over their own writing processes. Proponents of the genre approach, on the other hand, particularly in Australia, for example, the researchers Christie, Gilbert, and Martin, have argued strongly that the ideas of Graves, particularly the attention paid to the generation of original writing, are misguided, and that students need explicit guidance in order to learn the distinguishing features of different kinds of writing or genres. The debate continues; in my view both approaches have contributed towards our understanding of how best to improve the teaching and learning of writing.

Standards of writing have always been a matter for

public concern, and every now and then a flare-up in the media draws attention to the apparent lack of preparedness of school leavers for the writing demands of business or further education. Public perceptions, however, do not match the available evidence. Much research, some recounted in this ***set*** (Elley, Lamb), has now established that standards of literacy have not fallen in recent years despite the more heterogeneous student populations in both Australia and New Zealand. The IEA Written Composition Study in which New Zealand (though not Australia) participated showed that most 12- and 15-year-old students wrote well in a variety of genres and that their writing was not full of basic spelling and punctuation errors.

A number of other themes have been influential in the 1980s. It is now widely accepted that many children take a strong interest in writing before they begin school, and studies have been made of the development of children's knowledge about reading and writing in the early years (e.g., Gentry and Giacobbe in this ***set***; and research by Taylor). The implications for teachers are very clear – that it cannot be assumed that children arrive at school with no literacy awareness, nor that all that is necessary is to provide them with models of accurate language usage and they will be able to mimic these, at progressively more sophisticated levels, until they reach adult competency. However, there are still very few detailed studies of the acquisition of early writing with Marie Clay's work being a notable exception. Also, in the 1980s, increasing attention was given to the links between reading and writing and the role that each can play in assisting the development of the other.

Writing development in every part of every school, primary and secondary, has also become a focus, and the related notions of *writing to learn* and *learning through writing* (Mayher, Lester and Pradl have written a book about these themes). Writing-across-the-curriculum is a significant catch phrase in some institutions. However, this important principle is rarely taken up by the majority of schools or teachers. It is a pity since every teacher, whether it is acknowledged or not, is a teacher of writing in some way, just by encouraging certain sorts of writing or discouraging others.

Perhaps Graves's most notable contribution has been to reinforce the importance of allowing children to experience the pleasures of authorship. Hence, there has been a greater interest in the production of books written by children in the classroom; these are then made available to others. In some schools, writers have been paid to spend time in residence so that pupils can observe how writers go about their work. The writers can also provide guidance to children with their own writing. In these ways students become aware that writing can be fun, though it is also hard work.

Another key idea has been the importance of modelling, or providing an example to students. Many teachers write in the classroom at the same time as their pupils, sharing in the same kinds of activities and talking about the difficulties they have, as a way of encouraging writing development.

Perhaps the most significant idea emerging from research (though beginning to be reflected more in resources for writing teachers) has been the emphasis upon writing processes. Graves has given impetus to this concept in schools, though the research of Hayes and Flower, examining the composing processes used by college writers and comparing the practices of expert writers with novice writers, has helped to illuminate the components of writing, the points at which many students experience difficulties, and writing's recursiveness (i.e., the highly interlinked and overlapping nature of writing).

Finally, with computers being used in education more and more, there is a greater awareness of how word processing programmes can assist the development of writing. Many teachers encourage the use of computers in their writing programmes (see Snyder in this ***set***, and other work by Chandler and Marcus, Daiute).

Research

Research on writing intensified throughout the 1980s. Many North American and Australian universities now have at least one staff member with an active interest in the teaching of writing. Research which can foster the development of writing, as well as adding to our knowledge of the writing process, is under way, particularly in those departments which teach composition courses (still rare in Australia and New Zealand). A significant number of research studies have now been carried out on writing, including major surveys of the field (e.g., Hillocks, Tate) and research programmes, such as the studies carried out by the Centre for the Study of Writing at the University of California, Berkeley, and Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, continue to yield valuable material. Books (e.g., by Bereiter and Scardamalia) and journals (e.g., *Written Communication*) have proliferated. The teaching of writing has been underpinned by a body of knowledge which is continually being refined and added to.

Much of this research effort has explored the development of writing skills, influenced by studies of the acquisition of writing in young children or the composing processes of university students (Flower). Clay's study (1975) is a good example, showing how pre-schoolers and children in their first year of school acquire notions about what is involved in writing. In this ***set***, Gentry discusses research carried out by Bissex on her son from the age of 4 to 10 years, as he moves through various stages in discovering more and more about spelling (though Bissex's book looks in more detail at the acquisition of both reading and writing) and Giacobbe offers a glimpse of what children know about writing in their first week at school.

Several surveys of the kinds of writing students encounter in schools have been undertaken (*see* Woods in this ***set***, and Spencer) particularly in the early 1980s. Efforts have been made to develop typologies of different kinds of writing (Davis) or to describe the features of texts produced by students (Harris and Wilkinson). The assessment of writing skills (and, in earlier times, of marker reliability) was also the focus of many research studies; it is likely to become more important through the 1990s as governments with financial imperatives become more preoccupied with issues of accountability and national standards.

Many educators have started to take a closer interest in the development of national assessment systems. In Australia, for example, the short-lived Australasian Co-operative Assessment Program began to develop literacy profiles, while in the United Kingdom the National Curriculum and its associated key stages for assessment of pupils' competency at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16 has drawn attention towards students' writing performance more

than ever before. A related development in New Zealand is the 'Achievement Initiative', a policy of the government elected in 1990, which is aimed at increasing student learning and achievement. A strong emphasis is placed on assessment issues in this ***set***.

In Australia, researchers who have played an important role in extending our awareness of ways of teaching writing have included scholars such as Cambourne, examining the development of literacy learning in primary schools using naturalistic techniques, and Christie, Gilbert, and Martin, who have extended our views of ways to improve the teaching of different kinds of writing using insights from linguistics. Johnston has explored various non-judgemental ways of assessing students' writing in order to help students to respond positively to feedback about their writing. Most of these researchers have also produced resources for teachers.

In New Zealand, Clay, Glynn, and Philips have undertaken studies of writing. Clay has focused upon how children learn to write as part of her research into reading, while Glynn, using applied behaviour analysis, has examined ways of helping students with basic writing problems, for example, to generate text. Philips, also influenced by naturalistic approaches for classroom research (e.g., Perl) observed 'successful' teachers at work in primary and secondary schools and has studied how computers may be used to develop writing skills.

Teaching Writing Teaching

There have been considerable advances in the teaching of writing in New Zealand and Australian schools over the past decade. In the early 1980s in both New Zealand and Australia Graves was particularly influential with his focus upon the writing process. He spoke at several important conferences (e.g., the IFTE conference in Sydney in 1980) and his edited papers (Walshe) and book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* have sold well. Few primary teachers can have been uninfluenced by at least some of his ideas. His approaches have become a new kind of orthodoxy.

Other teachers and researchers such as Martin and Gilbert have challenged Graves's methods as too unstructured, leading to chaos in the classroom. Cambourne has also had a major impact though his concerns as an educator are not just with writing but with a holistic approach towards literacy teaching. Richardson's article on the two competing pedagogies – process-based and genre-based – in Australia is a sound overview of some of the main issues.

What has been done to transmit knowledge about the teaching of writing to teachers? In New Zealand perhaps the most significant innovation has been the New Zealand Writing Project, based upon the framework of the Bay Area Writing Project in the United States. This approach reflects the fundamental principle that the best ways to improve writing are to practise writing, to discuss proven techniques, and to study research findings applying to classroom practice; it is described in detail in a book by Carruthers *et al*, *The Word Process*.

Another development has been the use of writers in schools. The New Zealand Book Council has administered a scheme for several years which enables primary and secondary schools to have a visiting writer speak about their writing to groups of pupils. A list of accredited writers is maintained by the Book Council. This scheme, while it functions only indirectly to improve the teaching of writing, does allow both teachers and students to focus upon aspects of the writing process.

For teachers, research on the assessment of writing has offered some useful insights. The doubtful usefulness of grammar teaching (*see* Elley in this ***set***) is now well established, at least among writing researchers if not among the general public or politicians. Writing models as standards (benchmarks) for judging students' writing have not been very influential, nor have writing checklists. Developmental profiles of individual pupils are becoming of great interest, particularly in Australia and Britain (Broadfoot). Many teachers find the notion useful but many more remain to be convinced.

There are few, if any, sound standardised tests of writing competence. While research has demonstrated that the reliability of essay marking can be dramatically improved when criteria are made explicit and markers carefully work through samples, adjusting the basis for their judgements using consensus decision-making, much work remains to be done in this area to produce cost-effective methods. The model used in the IEA Study of Written Composition (Lamb) is probably impractical for most schools despite its usefulness as an in-service technique.

Perhaps the most interesting development for assisting students to write better is responsive feedback, researched using different methods by Johnston in Australia and Glynn in New Zealand. Students are given explicit guidance on what they are doing inappropriately and supplied with techniques for improving their writing. This approach is recounted in an accessible way in Brian Johnston's book, *Assessing English*.

Conclusion

One of the more popular myths about writing is that it cannot be taught. Yet we live in a world where more and more emphasis is placed upon accountability and the measurement of outcomes. The education system of most countries has not been immune from this pressure. It seems to me that the tension between (a) teaching to encourage the personal, developmental, emotional aspects of writing and (b) the imperative to inculcate accuracy then to determine students' skill levels by testing their competency, is unlikely to be resolved until greater respect is accorded to the results of research.

High on the list of educational priorities must remain: (1) the quality of writing and the writing experience; (2) the opportunities afforded for learning (irrespective of the subject content); (3) the need to understand the writing process or the act of composing or invention (*see* Young). An obsession with structured descriptions such as attainment levels, minimal competencies, and standards is likely to undo much of the good work of writing researchers over the past decade and to be antipathetic to sound educational practice.

Researchers need to focus much more directly on the consequences for teaching and learning of such politically motivated approaches. Perhaps the genre-based approach for writing teaching is a useful compromise between the artificiality of age-related standardised assessment tasks and the age-old problem of subjectivity associated with letting students write whatever they want, in an unguided fashion, and then judging their work simply on the basis of its sincerity or originality!

It is also important that research in the future, as it is beginning to do, places far greater emphasis upon the contexts in which writing is acquired rather than interpreting writing as an individualistic skill. The latter emphasis raises pedagogical implications but no others. Little research has been carried out into the role of parents or of other caregivers in fostering the development of writing skills (Taylor), and the political dimensions of writing have rarely been closely examined (Lankshear).

Writing will continue to be one of the focal points of education. Technological changes which appear to place a greater focus upon instant communication (e.g., sophisticated teleconferencing facilities) and aural/oral modes of learning, in no way diminish the importance of writing or of permanent records. The analysis of information, irrespective of its source (e.g., from complex databases), and the presentation of cogent arguments for decision-making, require finely tuned writing skills.

Claims that writing is no longer relevant to the modern world are unsustainable. If anything, it is now more important than ever to be able to write well. Each of the pieces in *Best of* ***set:*** *Writing* assists our understanding of the teaching and learning of writing and makes a contribution towards this goal.

Note

David Philips is a member of the Learning and Assessment Policy Unit of the New Zealand Ministry of Education, Private Box 1666, Wellington, New Zealand. He was formerly a research officer with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, specialising in writing and its assessment.

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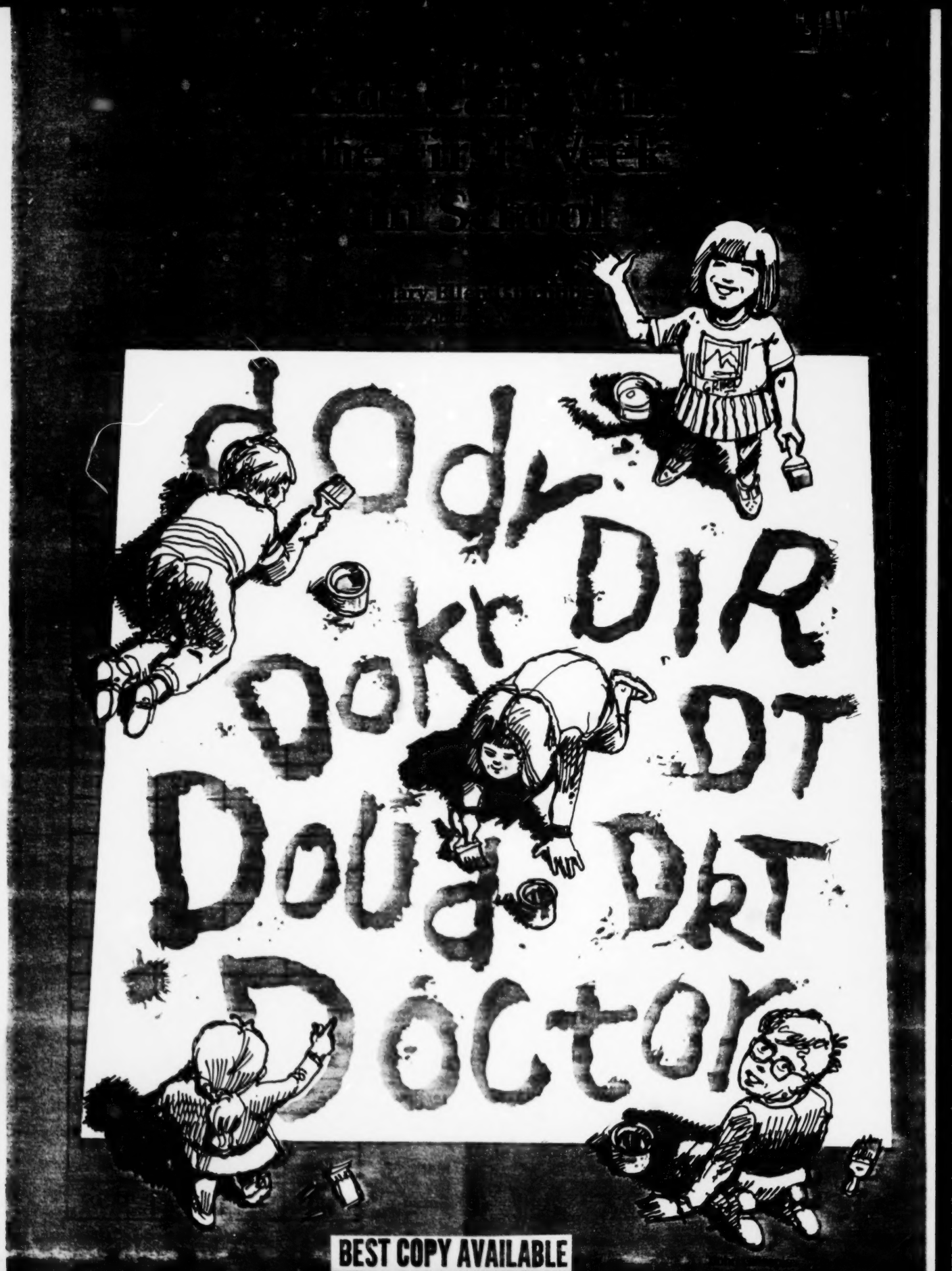

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Kids Can Write the First Week in School

By Mary Ellen Giacobbe
Atkinson Academy, New Hampshire

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Children say they can write but that they can not read. They can hold a crayon, marker, pencil or some other kind of writing instrument and they can produce some form of written expression.

When this school year began I wanted to find out what my first graders attending the Atkinson Academy, the public school in Atkinson, New Hampshire, could do as writers. On the first day of school I gave five of them an A4 exercise book containing forty sheets of unlined paper. I told them that these were for them to write in. The other seventeen children were assigned to other areas in the classroom.

I circulated around the classroom observing and talking with the children. 'Tell me about your building.' . . . 'Why do you think the sand goes through this strainer faster than through that strainer?' . . . 'How many cubes do you think it will take to fit across the top of the desk?'

Someone tugged at my sleeve and I turned to see Mark standing by my side with his journal. 'Tell me about your drawing, Mark,' I said.

He pointed to each part of the drawing and said, 'This is the ocean and this is a sailboat and this is the anchor. These are clouds.'

He had written BD for boat and KLD for cloud. I could tell that the oversized anchor was important but he felt that he couldn't write anchor so I helped him.

'Can I do another page?' he asked.

I nodded my head and Mark rejoined Ellen at the writing table. Ellen was tracing around her hand with a blue marker. Then with a red marker she colored the entire center and thumb and then continued to color the fingers orange, purple, brown and black. A big yellow sun appeared in the top right corner and two flowers grew to the left of the hand. Short, straight, vertical, green lines bordered the bottom of the page. Ellen wrote:

The Trce was Tacan a wec
(The turkey was taking a walk.)

She read it to herself, crossed out the *T* in *Tacan*, changed it to a *w* and on top of *a wec*, she wrote *D the hall*. Her message now read:

The Trce was wacan D the hall
(The turkey was walking down the hill.)

Already Ellen knew that she could change her message so that it said exactly what she wanted it to say. She was rereading and revising.

My attention was drawn to the tap, tap, tapping of the black marker on David's page as he was creating a snowstorm. He wrote:

I So So
(I saw snow.)

David said, 'This is a big snowstorm. A real blizzard.' As he touched each word, he read, 'I saw snow.'

I asked David, 'What do you notice about the words *saw* and *snow*?' He replied, 'They both begin with the same sound.'

Figure 1 — *Class Spelling Patterns — First Week of School*

	rag	five	buzz	doctor
Ellen	rag	fiv	Bozo	Dokr
Helen	ro	FS	B	D
Frank	F	F	P	D
Greg	Rag	Fly	Biƨ	DIdi
John	RAKG	FAF	ꓭAƩ	DAODR
Brian	rag	ⅎif	das	dodr
Jennifer	RAG	FIVE	BIƩ	DOCTR
Lisa	RAG	FOYV	BAƩ	DOCTR
Kelly	RIG	FIV	BIS	DIR
Bob	RAG	FA	BƩƩ	DIr
Carl	RaG	FiFv	Bis	DOKR
Linda	RAG	ViN	BST	DKT
Sarah	RAG	FIV	BIZ	DOR
Diane	Rag	fuv	buz	Dorsc
Donna	rag	foif	Bus	Doud
David	Rag	Fiv	Baz	DOCtr
Jeremy	RAG	FiVE	Buzz	DOCTOR
Ed	RAG	FiVE	Buzz	DOCTOR
Mark	iA	FF	BS	DT
Susan	raG	Fiv	BU	DOD

Lisa's marker was filling the page with 3cm letters to tell about her drawing of a huge blue circle with a yellow and a white dot in the center. I joined her on the rug just as she was finishing:

TES IS A PEKHTR
(This is a picture.)

'Could you tell me more about your picture, Lisa?' I asked.

She turned the page and replied, 'In just a minute.' As she continued to write, a duck and a pond became obvious. Her message:

AV A POND AND A DAK
(of a pond and a duck)

Throughout the morning the children who weren't writing were asking, 'When am I going to get my book?' . . . 'Can I have a book like those guys?' . . . 'Am I going to get my book tomorrow?'

By the third day of school all twenty-two children had their own journals and were all writing. I knew that children could write sooner than we think but I thought it would take longer than three half-days of school before an entire class of five, six and seven year olds would be writers.

As the blank pages in their journals came alive with drawings and words telling of their experiences, I could see these children had entered school ready to engage in the active process of writing. They were writing their own workbooks. They were showing me what they knew as well as what they needed to know. There were no errors to be red penciled. Just information showing me what the next step of instruction should be.

In my education courses, I had been taught that children must first be able to read and when they had a reading vocabulary they could begin to write. These children were contradicting that teaching. They could write even though they could not read. (However, they were usually able to read what they wrote!)

During the second week of school I administered a self-made writing test of twenty words. In choosing the words I tried to use as many different initial and final consonants and long and short vowels as possible. Fifteen of the words were one syllable and five were two syllable words.

I worked with the children individually or in pairs. I gave each an A4 sheet of paper sectioned into rectangles numbered one to twenty. I asked the children to write the word *rag* next to the number one. I did not emphasize any sounds. I said the word as I would in normal conversation. I continued with the rest of the test in the same manner.

After ninety minutes of testing, I learned that my first grade children were able to write far more than I ever imagined. I wondered why I had waited so long to let my children write in other years. Figure 1 shows the results from a sampling of the test. Four of the words used in the tests are written across the top. The children's responses are listed below. Jeremy and Ed had come to school able to write most words accurately. Helen was able to write the initial sounds of words.

The responses of four children are shown for the entire test of twenty words in Figure 2.

Jennifer and Lisa knew all the consonant sounds and were able to use them when writing a word. They were also using vowels. Bob was writing most initial and final consonants with a sprinkling of vowels. Mark was writing *r* in the medial position in *zero* but did not hear *r* in the initial position in *rag*, or at the end of *doctor*.

Figure 2 — *Spelling Patterns — Twenty Words — First Week of School*

	rag	buzz	lid	six	game	nice	doctor	view	yellow	kiss
Jennifer	RAG	BIƩ	LeD	sics	GAM	NIS	DOCTR	VUW	YeLLO	KISS
Lisa	RAG	BAƩ	LED	SECS	GAM	NAIYS	DOCTR	VYU	YLO	KES
Bob	RAG	BƩƩ	LD	S	GMA	N	DIr	VU		CS
Mark	iA	BS	LED	SS	KM	NS	DT	UO	LO	KiSS

	camp	zero	hill	tack	five	pickle	muffin	wife	job	quick
Jennifer	KAP	ZARO	HAL	TAK	FIVE	PICL	MIFN	WIF	JOB	CWC
Lisa	KEP	ƩERO	HEL	TAC	FOYV	PECL	MFEN	WAIYF	GOB	COEC
Bob	CAP	ƩiO	HLLL	TAC	FA	PCL	MAF	WAF	ƬOP	CWC
Mark	KP	ƩRO	UL	TK	FF	PL	MFA	WAF	GB	KWK

What I Found Out

1. Most of the children felt this was an activity they could do.
2. Only two said, 'I don't know how to write.'
3. The two children that said they did not know how to write did not know all of their letters. Ken would say, 'Buzz. Buh, buh. B. What does a B look like?' He was hearing the sound; he could reproduce the sound and give it a letter name but he could not remember what the letter looked like.
4. Some children said, 'Is that right?' I would reply, 'What do you think?' They would respond, 'It sounds that way to me!' or 'That's all I hear.'
5. All of the children wrote in a left to right direction.
6. Most of the children knew the initial and final consonant sounds and were able to use them in writing a word.

The children did not stop writing at the end of the first week of school. They have been writing continuously for almost three months. Their words now make sentences and their sentences tell stories. Forty-seven books have been typed and sewn into hard covers which have become their reading. Because my children write, they now say, 'Yes, we can read!'

Editorial Note

Mrs Giacobbe's research grew out of her desire to know more about the children in her grade one classroom. It was stimulated by the work of a research team under Professor Donald Graves of New Hampshire University which spent a year in classrooms observing children writing. Professor Graves is at present writing a book on the results of the work but several papers have already appeared in academic and teachers' journals, and, he says more importantly, in the equivalent of the Australian and New Zealand *Woman's Weekly*.

Here are one or two of his comments on writing research in the junior school in America, some comments on good research, and on teachers as researchers.

In the USA in the last 25 years only 156 studies have been made of how children begin writing. Most of these were attempts to find 'good methods' of teaching writing. Almost all of them were done by students, many as exercises to show how well they could apply what they had learnt about statistics. Most money in American elementary education is spent on developing children's reading skills, for every $3000 spent on children's ability to receive information only $1 was spent on their power to send it in writing. Up to 1972 over half of the meagre amount of writing research was concerned with what teachers were doing. Only 12% was concerned with what the children did when they wrote.

Experimental writing research has helped the classroom teacher very little and there has been hardly any advice about teaching writing that has been based on research. This is in spite of the fact that experimental research purports to give direct help. Experiments have, on the whole, been set up to answer the questions that teachers ask most: 'What will stimulate good writing?' or 'What is the best way to correct papers?' Typically an experiment will try three different stimuli to 'activate' students into better writing. One group, carefully matched by statistical measures, will receive no help. If one of the methods (usually the favourite method of the researcher) shows by better than 95:1 odds that its good results are not due to chance, then the approach is purported to be valid for all children and teachers.

But this experimental method transfers scientific methods which work for selecting grass seed to social events and processes. If information from one educational study is to be used in another teaching situation, with other children, by other teachers, a thorough description of the contextual factors need to be given. Both the process and the context should be given and then teachers can see if the information is of use to them.

Teachers who read information about process and context often want to try informal research projects of their own. Since the procedures were conducted in classrooms, they see themselves in the midst of the data along with the children. They begin to keep daily records of skills advancement along with collected writings of the children. Using charts of daily child conferences, reading and writing growth patterns are observed and recorded. Much of these data are one step away from formal research studies, and can be immensely helpful in day to day teaching for the teachers who do them.

Item 4

THE BEST OF Set Writing

Spelling Genius at Work

Dick Frizzell

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Spelling Genius at Work

An analysis of developmental spelling in *GNYS AT WRK*

By Richard Gentry
Western Carolina University

GNYS AT WRK by Glenda Bissex is a fascinating account of her son Paul's development of written language from his first writing as a 4-year-old until he was 10. Richard Gentry sees five stages in learning to spell revealed, he shows what is involved in each stage, and what the teacher can do to help.

Teachers who understand that spelling is a complex developmental process can help students acquire spelling competency. Initially, the teacher must recognize five stages of spelling development. Once the stages are identified, the teacher can provide opportunities for children to develop cognitive strategies for dealing with English orthography, and assess the pupil's development. This article demonstrates a scheme for categorizing spelling development and shows ways to foster pupils' spelling competency. In doing so, it integrates important work by Bissex (1980), spelling researchers, and reading language researchers over the past decade.

GNYS AT WRK, an account of a case study conducted by Glenda Bissex (1980), contributes much understanding to how children may develop reading, writing, and oral language skills. In addition, it provides an excellent data base for this focus on spelling development. Bissex traces her son Paul's written language development from his first writing as a 4-year-old through productions typical of fourth graders whose reading, writing, and spelling development has progressed normally up through the ages of 9 or 10 years.

This article applies a developmental spelling classification system to the Bissex case study, revealing developmental stages that researchers (Beers and Henderson, 1977; Gentry, 1977; Henderson and Beers, 1980; Read, 1975) have discovered in children's early spelling and writing. Such pre-existing form suggests 'that learning to spell is not simply a matter of memorizing words but in large measure a consequence of developing cognitive strategies for dealing with English orthography . . .' (Read and Hodges, in press). Further, the article outlines the developmental process and provides suggestions for how spelling development may be nurtured in the classroom.

As children discover the intricacies of printed English, they progress through five levels of spelling, with each representing a different conceptualization of English orthography: precommunicative spelling, semiphonetic spelling, phonetic spelling, transitional spelling, and correct spelling (Gentry, 1978). A progresive differentiation of orthographic knowledge may be observed which, over time, enables the competent speller to rely on multiple strategies, including visual, phonological, and lexial or morphological information accrued not from rote memory but from extensive experience with written language (Read and Hodges, in press). The classification system applied here to the Bissex case study focuses on an analysis of spelling miscues and observation of the strategies used to spell words. Classification is based primarily on studies reported by Read (1975) and Henderson and Beers (1980).

Precommunicative stage

Developmental spelling studies (Gentry 1977; Henderson and Beers, 1980) have identified the earliest level of spelling development as the level where the child first uses symbols from the alphabet to represent words. [Note, however, that writing development begins much earlier, with pencil or pen handling and scribbling as early as 18 months of age (Gibson and Levin, 1975).] Paul, before the formal observation of the Bissex case study began, had clearly been a precommunicative speller. Bissex provides two samples of Paul's productions at this earliest spelling level which, for Paul, appeared while he was still 4 years old. She describes the first examples as a 'welcome home' banner that took the following form (actual size 30 by 120 cm):

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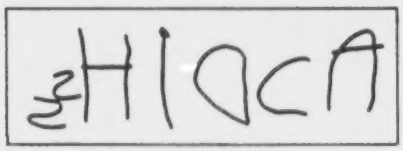
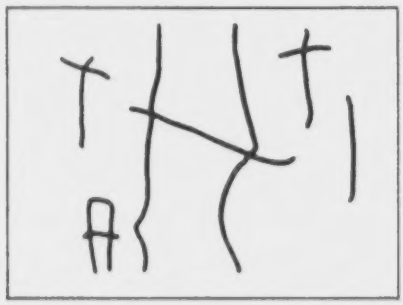


Bissex (1980, p. 4) reports other incidences of precommunicative spelling: 'Next, he [Paul] typed strings of letters which he described as notes to his friends. Then he produced a handwritten message — large, green letters to cheer me up when I was feeling low:



These first, occasional writings spanned several months, during which time he showed an interest in handwriting.' Such instances clearly document Paul's stint as a precommunicative speller. [Illustrations from *GYNS AT WRK: A Child Learns to Write and Read*, by Glenda L. Bissex, published by Harvard University Press, reprinted by permission of the publisher.]

A speller is specifically precommunicative when his/her spelling errors are characterized by the following behaviours (Bissex, 1980; Goodman, 1980; Söderbergh, 1971; Torrey, 1973).

(1) The speller demonstrates some knowledge of the alphabet through production of letter forms to represent a message.

(2) The speller demonstrates *no* knowledge of letter-sound correspondence. Spelling attempts appear to be a random stringing together of letters of the alphabet which the speller is able to produce in written form.

(3) The speller may or may not know the principle of left-to-right directionality for English spelling.

(4) The speller may include number symbols as part of the spelling of a word.

(5) The speller's level of alphabet knowledge may range from much repetition of a few known alphabetic symbols to substantial production of letters of the alphabet.

(6) The speller frequently mixes uppercase and lowercase letters indiscriminately.

(7) The speller generally shows a preference for upper case letter forms in his/her earliest samples of writing.

The primary constraint under which the precommunicative speller operates is a lack of knowledge of letter-sound correspondence. As a result, precommunicative spelling attempts are not readable — hence the term 'precommunicative.' Though these initial attempts are purposeful productions representing the child's concept of words, at this stage spellings do not communicate language by mapping letters to sounds.

'Precommunicative' appears to be a more appropriate level of this first stage than the term 'deviant,' which is used in some earlier studies (Gentry, 1977; Gentry, 1978). Although precommunicative spellings deviate extensively from conventional spelling patterns, they are in no sense unnatural or uncommon, as the word 'deviant' implies. Precommunicative spelling is the natural early expression of the child's initial hypothesis about how alphabetic symbols represent words.

The semiphonetic stage

The second stage of spelling development, which for Paul began at 5 years 1 month of age and lasted only a few weeks, is illustrated by productions such as: RUDF [Are you deaf?!], GABJ [garbage], BZR [buzzer], KR [car], TLEFNMBER [telephone number], PKIHER [picture], BRZ [birds], DP [dump], HAB [happy], OD [old]. These invented spellings, called semiphonetic (reported as 'prephonetic' in some earlier studies), represent the child's first approximations to an alphabetic orthography.

Unlike the previous stage, semiphonetic spellings represent letter-sound correspondence. It is at this stage that a child first begins to conceptualize the alphabetic principle. The conditions of semiphonetic spelling are:

(1) The speller begins to conceptualize that letters have sounds that are used to represent sounds in words.

(2) Letters used to represent words provide the partial (but not total) mapping of phonetic representation for the word being spelled. Semiphonetic spelling is abbreviated; one, two, or three letters may represent the whole word.

(3) A letter name strategy is very much in evidence at the semiphonetic stage. Where possible the speller represents words, sounds, or syllables with letters that match their letter names (e.g., R [are]; U [you]; LEFT [elephant]) instead of representing the vowel and consonant sounds separately.

(4) The semiphonetic speller begins to grasp the left-to-right sequential arrangement of letters in English orthography.

(5) Alphabet knowledge and mastery of letter formation become more complete during the semiphonetic stage.

(6) Word segmentation may or may not be in evidence in semiphonetic spelling.

Paul's rather short stint as a semiphonetic speller may be attributed to the intensity and quantity of writing during the first month after his fifth birthday and to his mother's intervention (e.g., suggestion for spacing between words, supplying letter-sound correspondences upon request, encouragement and obvious interest in Paul's invented spellings). Bissex reports 'rapid flourishing and evolution of that development' (Bissex, 1980 p. 11) which is evident as Paul moved quickly away from semiphonetic to complete phonetic spelling. The evolution of complete phonetic spelling from the earlier semiphonetic version is demonstrated as Paul switched from TLEFN [telephone] to TALAFON [telephone], KR [car] to KOR [car], BRZ [birds] to BRDE [birdie], and produced messages with fewer semiphonetic and more phonetic spellings, such as the message Paul typed at 5 years 2 months: EF U KAN OPN KAZ I WIL GEV U A KN OPENR [If you can open cans I will give you a can opener] (underlined words are phonetic spellings) (p. 11).

The phonetic stage

Paul enjoyed spurts as a prolific phonetic speller from 5 years 1 month through around 5 years 8 months to 6 years 1 month, writing in a wide variety of forms: signs, lists, notes, letters, labels and captions, stories, greeting cards, game boards, directions, and statements (Bissex, 1980 p. 15). Examples of his phonetic spelling include: IFU LEV AT THRD STRET IWEL KOM TO YOR HAWS THE ED [If you live at Third Street I will come to your house. The End] (p. 13), and PAULZ RABR SAF RABRZ KANT GT EN [Paul's robber safe. Robbers can't get in] (p. 23).

The phonetic stage has been well documented in the literature (Beers, 1974; Gentry, 1977, 1978, 1981; Gentry and Henderson, 1978; Henderson and Beers, 1980; Read, 1971, 1975, 1980; Zutell, 1975, 1978). Read's (1975) very complete documentation reports children's phonetic spellings of 80 phonetypes, some reflecting obscure details of phonetic form. Children's phonetic spelling is the ingenious and systematic invention of an orthographic system that completely represents the entire sound structure of the word being spelled. Though some of the inventive speller's letter choices do not conform to conventional English spelling for some sounds, the choices are systematic and perceptually correct. Phonetic spellings (which are quite readable) adhere to the following conditions:

(1) For the first time the child is able to provide a total mapping of letter-sound correspondence; all of the surface sound features of the words being spelled are represented in the spelling.

(2) Children systematically develop particular spellings for certain details of phonetic form; namely, tense vowels, lax vowels, preconsonantal nasals, syllabic sonorants, *-ed* endings, retroflex vowels, affricates, and intervocalic flaps (Gentry, 1978; Read, 1975).

(3) Letters are assigned strictly on the basis of sound, without regard for acceptable English letter sequence or other conventions of English orthography.

(4) Word segmentation and spatial orientation are generally, but not always, in evidence during the phonetic stage.

Bissex reports examples of Paul articulating an awareness of English orthography that was developing through the mental exercise employed each time he wrote. ' "With letters there's two ways of spelling some words, he said, pointing out that 'cat' could be spelled K-A-T or C-A-T and 'baby' B-A-B-Y or B-A-B-E ' (p. 10). This cognitive awareness of English orthography becomes markedly more developed in children who are allowed to invent their own spellings during their progression throught the phonetic stage. As they become more and more aware of the conventions of English spelling, they emerge into the fourth stage.

Bissex correctly predicted Paul's move into 'the next phase of his spelling development,' the transitional stage (p. 15).

While writing the song book, Paul observed, 'You spell "book" B-O-O-K. To write "look" you just change one letter — take away the B and add an L.' This mental spelling and word transforming continued after his writing spurt temporarily petered out: 'If you took the L out of "glass" and pushed it all together, you'd have "gas",' he mused while lying in bed. Such manipulation was the form that the next phase of his spelling development took. The following week (5:3) he mentally removed the L from 'please' (for 'peas' or 'pees'), and after we had some conversation about Daedalus and Icarus, observed that 'if you put an L in front of Icarus, you get "licorice".' And 'if you take the T and R off "trike" and put a B in front, you have "bike".'

The transitional stage

Most of Paul's mental rehearsal and hypothesizing about words were unrecorded. It took place, however whenever he wrote and, as Bissex reports, sometimes when he was not writing. This kind of mental activity allowed Paul to make the discoveries necessary for moving into the transitional stage of spelling development. After 6 years 1 month, his spelling looked different from the previous phonetic spelling. A weather forecast from Newspaper # 1 said: THES AFTERNEWN IT'S GOING TO RAIN. IT'S GOING TO BE FAIR TOMORO. A news item in Newspaper # 4 read FAKTARE'S [factories] CAN NO LONGER OFORD MAKING PLAY DOW [dough] (p. 46)

Paul was a transitional speller throughout most of his first and second grade years.

The transition stage, during which time great integration and differentiation of orthographic forms take place, marks a major move toward standard English orthography. During this stage, the speller begins to assimilate the conventional alternatives for representing sounds. The speller undergoes a transition from great reliance on phonology or sound for representing words in the printed form to much greater reliance on visual and morphological representations. During this stage, instruction in reading and spelling facilitates the move toward spelling competency, but the changes affecting the speller's conceptualization of orthography are too complex to be explained by a simple visual memorization of spelling patterns (Chomsky and Halle, 1968; Henderson and Beers, 1980; Read and Hodges, in press).

(1) Transitional spellers adhere to basic conventions of English orthography: vowels appear in every syllable (e.g., EGUL instead of the phonetic EGL [eagle]; nasals are represented before consonants (e.g., BANGK instead of the phonetic BAK [bank]); both vowels and consonants are employed instead of a letter name strategy (e.g., EL rather than L for the first syllable of ELEFANT [elephant]); a vowel is represented before syllabic *r* even though it is not heard or felt as a separate sound (e.g., MONSTUR instead of the phonetic MOSTR [monster]); common English letter sequences are used in spelling (e.g., YOUNITED [united], STINGKS [stinks]); especially liberal use of vowel digraphs like *ai*, *ea*, *ay*, *ee*, and *ow* appears; silent *e* pattern becomes fixed as an alternative for spelling long vowel sounds (e.g., TIPE in place of the phonetic TIP [type]); inflectional endings like *s*, *'s*, *ing*, and *est* are spelled conventionally.

(2) Transitional spellers present the first evidence of a new visual strategy; the child moves from phonological to morphological and visual spelling (e.g., EIGHTEE instead of the phonetic ATE [eighty]).

(3) Due to the child's new visual strategy, transitional spellers may include all appropriate letters, but they may reverse some letters (e.g., TAOD [toad], HUOSE [house], OPNE [open]. Bissex (p. 44) attributes this phenomenon to interference. The new visual strategy, though in use, is not yet integrated to the point that the speller recognizes what 'looks right.'

(4) Transitional spellers have not fully developed the use of factors identified by researchers that contribute to spelling competency: graphemic environment of the unit, position in the word, stress, morpheme boundaries, and phonological influences (Bissex, 1980; Gibson and Levin, 1975; Venezky, 1970).

(5) Transitional spellers differentiate alternate spellings for

the same sound. A long *a* sound, for example, may be spelled the following ways by a transitional speller: EIGHTE [eighty], ABUL [able], LASEE [lazy], RANE [rain], and SAIL [sale]. However, as indicated above in condition number 4, the conditions governing particular alternatives for representing a sound are only partially understood at the transitional stage.

(6) Transitional spellers generally used learned words (correctly spelled words) in greater abundance in their writing.

Thus far, this analysis of developmental spelling has focused on information obtained from misspelled words. Early in development, semiphonetic and even some precommunicative spellers may have 'learned' or 'automatic' spellings for certain words like C-A-T or their names. These correct spellings offer no clues to the speller notion of how English orthography works and are interspersed with developmental forms in varying degrees. For example, correct forms may account for from 0 to 50% or more of the words in semiphonetic writing, depending largely upon the writer's exposure to reading and the amount and type of instructional intervention experienced. Developmental spelling levels may be determined only by observing spelling miscues, not by observation of words spelled correctly. As in reading muscue analysis, the miscues are 'the windows into the mind' (Goodman, 1979, p. 3) that allow the observer to determine the speller's level of development. Beyond the transitional stage, the child reaches a stage where miscues are relatively infrequent.

The correct stage

Correct spelling, though easily identified, may exist at different levels. Instructionally, a second grader is a 'correct speller' after mastering a certain corpus of words that has been designated as 'second grade level.' Likewise, a sixth grade level speller has mastered the designated sixth grade level corpus. 'Correct spelling' is usually viewed from the instructional scheme rather than the developmental scheme because developmental research beyond the ages of 8 or 9 is limited to a few research studies (Juola *et al.*, 1978; Marsh *et al.*, 1980; Templeton, 1979).

It may be that the major cognitive changes necessary for spelling competency are accomplished by the end of the transitional stage and that further growth is an extension of existing strategies. Research suggests that formal spelling instruction facilitates spelling growth once the child gets into the transitional stage (Allen and Ager, 1965). In addition to formal instruction, the child continues to learn from being attentive and interested in spelling through writing experiences. Beyond the transitional stage, frequent writing experiences with some formal instruction enables children to attain spelling competency over a period of time (usually 5 or 6 years).

Developmentally, Paul was a 'correct' speller by the time he was 8 years old. At that time he knew the English orthographic system and its basic rules. (At 8, Paul's spelling achievement was superior to the average development for children his age.) Further experience with words would result in finer discrimination and an extension of orthographic knowledge, but Paul had entered the correct stage, where the basis of his knowledge of English orthography was firmly set. His spelling matched well the characteristics of the developmentally correct speller:

(1) The speller's knowledge of the English orthographic system and its basic rules is firmly established.

(2) The correct speller extends his/her knowledge of word environmental constraints (i.e., graphemic environment in the word, position in word, and stress).

(3) The correct speller shows an extended knowledge of word structure including accurate spelling of prefixes, suffixes, contractions, and compound words, and ability to distinguish homonyms.

(4) The correct speller demonstrates growing accuracy in using silent consonants and in doubling consonants appropriately.

(5) The correct speller is able to think of alternative spellings and employ visual identification of misspelled words as a correction strategy. He/she recognizes when 'words don't look right.'

(6) The correct speller continues to master uncommon alternative patterns (e.g., *ie* and *ei*) and words with irregular spellings.

(7) The correct speller masters Latinate forms and other morphological structures.

(8) The child accumulates a large corpus of learned words.

The developmental spelling scheme presented here has progressed through precommunicative, semiphonetic, phonetic, transitional, to correct spelling. Change from one spelling stage to the next is more or less gradual; samples of more than one stage may co-exist in a particular sample of writing as the child moves from one stage to the next.

Development, however, is continous. Children do not fluctuate between stages, passing from phonetic back into semiphonetic spelling or from transitional back to phonetic (Gentry, 1977). As spelling develops, children draw increasingly from alternative strategies — phonological, visual, and morphological. Development proceeds from simple to more complex, from concrete to more abstract form, toward differentiation and integration. Teachers can nurture this process in the classroom by providing opportunities for children to develop cognitive strategies for dealing with English orthography.

Fostering spelling competency in the classroom

The following guidelines enable primary teachers to help children acquire foundations for spelling competency.

(1) Provide purposeful writing experiences in the classroom. Purposeful writing is the key to cognitive growth in spelling. As pupils hypothesize and mentally rehearse printed representations for words, they engage in the cognitive activity needed for developmental growth. This activity is most frequent and natural when children write for a purpose, that is, enjoy a meaningful experience of sharing information in print. This occurs whenever children write stories, songs, lists, plans, messages, recipes, letters, and signs. It occurs when writing is both functional and fun.

(2) Have pupils write frequently. Pupils should add something new to their creative writing folders each week. Writing (integrated with all aspects of the curriculum and with all classroom activity), should be a natural part of the daily classroom routine. As in learning any complex cognitive process, practice and frequency of occurrence are important. Frequent application of spelling knowledge while writing moves spelling forward developmentally.

(3) De-emphasize correctness, writing mechanics, and memorization. The primary school teacher's main job is to set the foundations for spelling growth. When frequent purposeful writing in the classroom takes precedence, focus on

correctness, mechanics, and memorization must be secondary. Early overemphasis on mechanical aspects of spelling inhibits natural development spelling competency and growth. This is not to suggest eliminating mechanics altogether. Proofreading and editing should begin early. Handwriting should be taught. Models of correct writing, patterns of written form, and teacher edited and typed versions of children's works should be a part of the classroom. The core of this activity, however, should be children's purposeful writing. Teacher expectations for correctness should be adjusted to fit the pupils' level of development.

(4) Help pupils develop spelling consciousness. An environment of frequent purposeful writing provides numerous opportunities for teachers to help students discover more about spelling words. In responding to children's writing, teachers build pupil interest in words, make word study fun, answer questions, and teach skills. Pupils become conscious of English spelling without being overwhelmed by its complexity.

(5) Observe and assess pupil progress. Guidelines 1 through 4 suggest ways the teacher may teach spelling as a cognitive activity. Knowing how to intervene and what instructional skills to address hinge upon teacher knowledge of the developmental process, teacher observation, and assessment. Teachers may begin by applying stage descriptions (provided in this article) to samples of the child's writing to determine the child's developmental level. Level of development and observation provide clues for instruction. For precommunicative and semiphonetic spellers, instruction may focus on alphabet knowledge, directionality of print and its spatial orientation, children's concept of words, matching oral language to print, and representing sounds with letters. Phonetic spellers are ready for introduction to the conventions of English orthography: word families, spelling patterns, phonics, and word structure. Word study is extended for the transitional speller, who is ready for a spelling textbook and formal spelling instruction. Even after formal spelling instruction begins, the pupil must maintain a vigorous programme of independent writing. All writing is collected in a writing folder which becomes the focal point for assessment. The teachers analyzes the writing samples, noting changes in spelling strategies, application of skills taught, and general progress toward spelling competency.

In summary, learning to spell must be treated as a complex developmental process that begins at the preschool and primary school levels. As teachers observe spelling skills untold, they must engage pupils in the kinds of cognitive activity that lead to spelling competency.

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Item 5

Six Weeks Writing in Two Secondary School Classrooms

Trace Hodgson

Six Weeks Writing in Two Secondary School Classrooms

By David Philips
NZCER

When people say they do a lot of work in class, they usually mean writing and, for me, writing is the hardest thing to do.

Philip, a fourth former in a Wellington high school, was not very keen on writing. He thought little of his own writing ability, tended to write very slowly and was of the view that his difficulties with spelling prevented him from writing down good ideas:

When I spell things right I think it's good. I wouldn't mind writing so much if I could spell correctly.

For Philip, writing was indeed hard work.

Not all students find writing as painful as he does. Philip and several other students told me what they thought of writing as I looked on. Two of us spent six weeks in a third form (Year 8) and six weeks in a fourth form (Year 9) to find out how 13- and 14-year-olds approach the tasks which writing presents. We also noted how their teachers in English, Science and Social/Economic Studies were using written work as a part of their teaching. The students and teachers were interviewed regularly and actual samples of writing were examined while the students were producing them and afterwards. What strategies were used by the students when writing? How did the teachers tell their students what to write?

I How Do 13- and 14-Year-Olds Approach Writing?

Variety

In one school only, we selected 8 students for detailed study. Variety was the norm. There were differences in the emphasis given to presentation, in the amount of writing completed and the time taken, in the attention given to proofreading and revising, and in the way specific difficulties were handled (such as asking the teacher what to do).

Let's look at each of these aspects in turn to see how the students approached them.

(A) Presentation

Layout of pages

Much of the written work both the third and fourth formers were required to do was accompanied by diagrams, charts and other kinds of illustration, often forming an integral part of what they were asked to do. Most students also adhered to various requirements for the layout involving features such as the day's date, underlining, headings (important ones such as the titles of lists), gaps between paragraphs and sections of work, and margins.

Art work

Some students spent a great deal of effort on the appearance of the written page. Tidy handwriting, carefully lettered and coloured headings (most commonly using felt-tip pens), numbered sections and the date written in the top lefthand corner of the page received a lot of attention. A page from Tania's work illustrates this. (See figure 1.)

Figure 1
Page from Tania's Writing

4/10/83 **T.V.'s VIEW OF MEN AND WOMEN...**

The women in ad's seem to always have golden sun-tans, make-up and colgate smiles and long legs.
The men are good-looking, muscles, physical, golden tans and do physical jobs
Women are shown as housewives, or doing low jobs-secretary.
Men have high executive positions.

T.V. SURVEY ON "THE YOUNG DOCTORS."

① JOBS...

	M	F
① Secretary		✓
② Doctors	✓	
③ Nurses		✓
④ Orderlies	✓	
⑤ Sisters		✓
⑥ Kiosk Lady		✓
⑦ Admin.	✓	

② ACTIVITIES...

MALE	FEMALE
pushing things	beds
serve at bar	test samples
doctors	make/serve tea
order people about	answer phones/call.
look after child	write reports
	give orders.

③ APPEARANCE...

	M all	F all		m	F
good looking			married		"
skinny/slim	all	all	single	most	most
fat			blonde	'	'
tall	"	""	other colour	""	""
short	'		handicaps	o	
old	'				
young	most	most			
glasses					
Australian	all	all			
others					
long hair		"			
Short hair	all				

④ CLOTHING

FEMALE...

uniform	""	Hats	""
casual	'		
top	'	MALE ⇨	
skirts	'''		
jeans	'		
dresses	'		

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Getting the minimum down

Most students, however, were content with rather less artwork; to them an aesthetically pleasing page was less important than writing the least number of words required. Nearly all the students underlined headings, provided the date and gave extra attention to important headings. Occasionally, one or two students wrote out questions in a different colour from the rest of their text for additional emphasis. A few pupils in each class, too, largely ignored such aspects of presentation, perhaps because they interpreted them as finicky details, perhaps because they preferred to do other things. One fourth former, for example, often brought no exercise books to class, made a few jottings on a piece of borrowed paper and then consigned it to the rubbish bin at the end of the period.

Avoidance techniques

Many of the third formers found writing to be an unpleasant and difficult experience. Drawing or decorating pages enabled them to avoid writing. Another avoidance tactic was to give more time to headings, ruling off, underlining, or labelling maps, diagrams and charts than to putting together sentences. While some students wrote for a considerable portion of the English periods, for example, others preferred to search for suitable material for collages, to draw maps very carefully, or to colour-in headings and illustrations for a long-term project they were working on. Inevitably, prolonged attention to these activities reduced the time used for creating a 'text'.

Managing time

On the whole, however, they did not spend an unusual amount of time on presentation. When the deadline for handing in writing approached many students took an hour or more to sort pages out, to complete parts of tasks previously left unfinished, to rule off headings and, occasionally, to add colour to some pages. But, in general, the students simply wrote or chatted with their neighbours, rather than 'decorating'.

Individual decorative differences

Interestingly enough, those students who wrote the most, and also often appeared to enjoy writing a great deal, did not necessarily spend most time on presentation. Tania, for example, was one of the most prolific of the fourth formers, and also spent considerable time on presentation. Mark, however, the *most* prolific writer, was much less concerned about the presentation of his work. (See figure 2.)

Figure 2
Extract from Mark's Work

4/10/83 TV's View of Men and Women:

* Women use make up.
* Men shoot others.
* Women stay at home
* Women look after kids
* Men are allowed to go off with other women
* Women can't be disloyal
* Men do tough jobs and jobs of power.
* Women wash clothes and make breakfast.
* Men go to work.
* Men risk their lives.
* Women perm their hair.
* Men lead women.
* Men are stronger, tougher and more skilled.
* Women are thin, weak and dependant on men.
* Men play sports.

Do Three's Company
Charlie's Angels
Love Boat
Ready to Roll
Dukes of Hazzard
That's Incredible

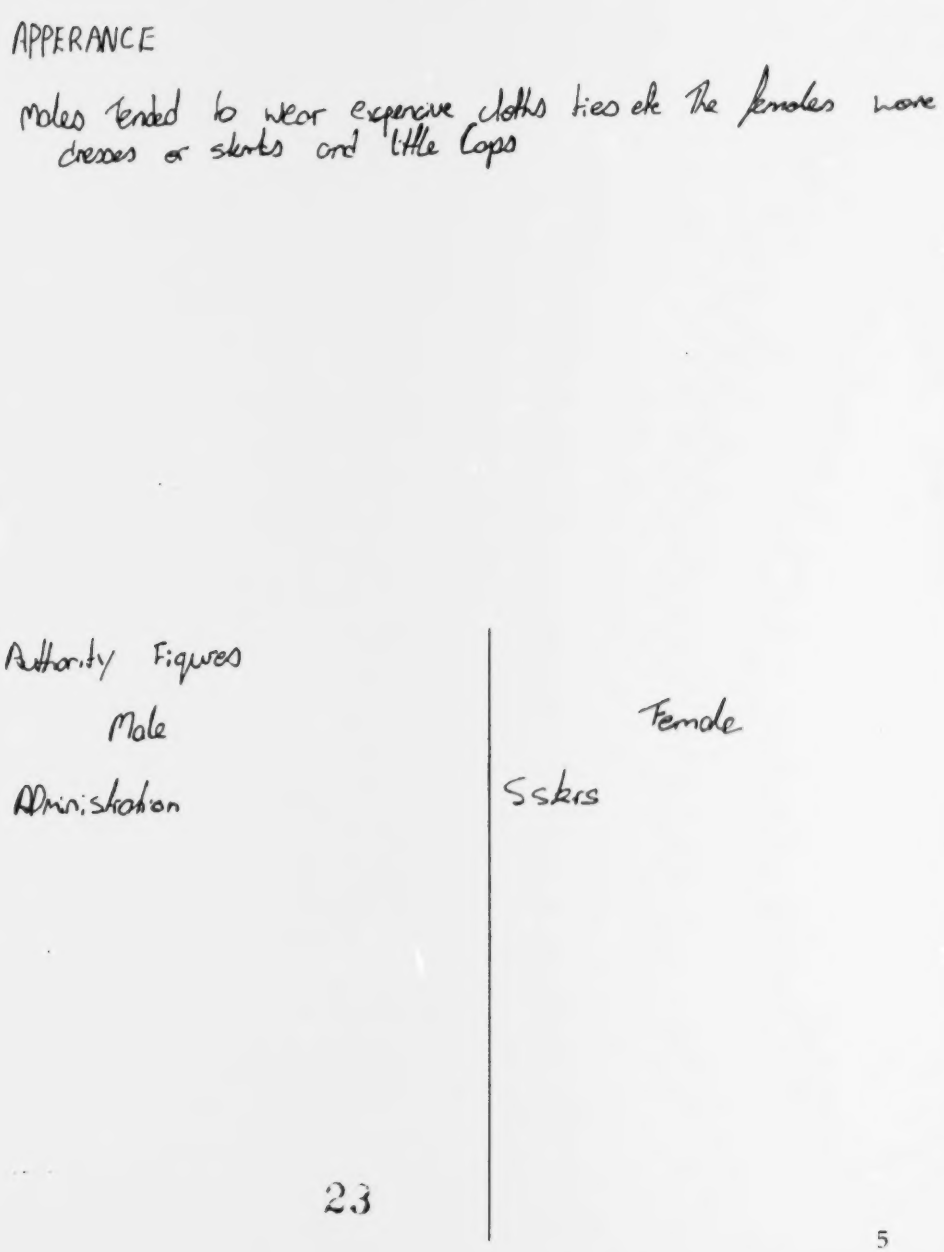
22

Although Mark's pages were well-organized, he wasted very little time in attending to matters of appearance, apart from underlining headings twice in red ballpoint. Even his diagrams in Science were hurriedly drawn. Mark preferred to *write*. Similarly, Irene, one of the most competent writers in the third form class, avoided elaborate headings and other decorative features. The remaining pupils were at one extreme or the other. Kate was meticulous about all aspects of presentation. Owen was unconcerned about presentation, often ignored the underlining of headings and left some parts of his work incomplete. (See figure 3.)

Handwriting

Nearly all the students observed had a legible script, though some styles of handwriting needed to be deciphered. However, it is worth noting that Mark, the most prolific, had handwriting that was generally untidy, possibly because of the rapidity with which he wrote. Again, there was not a simple relationship between legibility and overall writing competence, apart from those students who found spelling accurately very difficult and who also seemed to have problems in physically forming letters.

Figure 3
Extract from Owen's Work



(B) *Productivity*

Amount

The students also differed in the *amount* of writing they completed. The occasional student in each class wrote copious amounts for all assigned tasks. At the other extreme were pupils who wrote the bare minimum, failed to complete some tasks or did not even attempt others. As a result they produced significantly less writing daily, for nearly every task.

Speed

Rates of productivity varied markedly within each class from student to student. In the third form class, for example, one student once wrote three words in an hour while another pupil wrote three and a half pages. In the fourth form Social/Economic Studies Mark frequently wrote half a page or more in the time it took other pupils to write a few lines. (See figure 4.) Consequently, his responses were rather more detailed, covering a wider range of ideas. Over the whole period of the study he wrote more than four times as much as some of his peers. Nina, though, also a prolific writer, took longer to put her ideas down than Mark. Working in bursts was also common, with many pupils alternating between writing for a short period and talking to neighbours or gazing about the room. Other students found writing to be a difficult and laborious task, such as Philip and Leon, who often produced very little even when on-task.

Figure 4 (a)
An Extract from Mark's Notes

29/9/83 ~~Effect~~ Effect of Family Size on Women's Opportunities

If the family was fairly small then the woman of the family could then get a job as long as the kids were old enough. But if the family was rather large (5-15 kids) then the chances are that there are a few small kids and that the mother would have to stay home. Also the mother might be pregnant and she definately can't get a job that requires movement (that would be most jobs).

But, if the father of a large family can't earn enough money to support them then the mother might be forced to work if there aren't any older kids. There is an advantage in having an older child as he/she can look after the kids while the mother ~~and~~ works and also help with the household jobs.

Figure 4 (b)
An extract from Philip's Notes

Effected of family size on Womens opportunities.

If a mother had 9 or 10 kids they would all ways be in the way and she would have know time to do other things. But if she had 2 kids she would have to be in 7 places at once.

Dealing with a chore

For most students, writing was a chore. Even Mark, who never postponed writing, admitted that 'writing is boring – there's always something you have to hand in'. Some students, therefore, adopted avoidance tactics in order to postpone having to write until it was absolutely necessary. James and Owen rarely began writing with the other students and often left tasks till the last possible moment; Owen, however, could work fast when he wanted to. Another student on one occasion wrote six lines of a story and followed that up by writing in his name and address several times. Occasionally students would doodle on a scrap of paper or in the back of their exercise books. Others 'lost' work and had to start again.

Self-management

The fourth form Science teacher stated that 'Some pupils race ahead, and finish while others fluff about and don't get very much done'. Perhaps behaviour of this kind was more evident in Science simply because, as a result of the way the sessions were structured, students themselves usually decided when to write.

Anti-writing

Some students regularly 'lost' their previous day's work, or had an excuse for not doing their written homework. As a result, they often fell behind the class as a whole in the amount and range of writing completed; it seemed that these students were relatively unconcerned about finishing sections of written work accurately and reasonably comprehensively, or perhaps they lost interest in some tasks once new ones were set. Many students laboured over writing and clearly disliked having to write, such as Philip. Those who wrote least tended to have the severest writing difficulties.

(C) Proofreading, drafting and notetaking

A rare thing

Students in both classes rarely altered what they had first written. Proofreading or editing (checking sentences for their sense and grammatical accuracy, correcting misspelt words or punctuation), appeared to be undertaken very infrequently despite occasional reminders by some of the teachers about the need to read over. Kate, for example, claimed to proofread her written work but very rarely made alterations, and a large number of errors could be found in her writing. Owen also claimed to re-read his writing to check the sense of what he had written, but when words with spelling mistakes were pointed out to him in a passage he claimed to have checked, he admitted that he had not been aware of them. As did other students, however, Mark openly admitted that he was happy enough with his work and did not read it over. He said: 'I just write straight off. I don't read what I'm writing'. Crossed-out words in his writing were indeed very rare.

Changes, changes

Competence in writing and willingness to proofread seemed to have nothing to do with each other: both good writers and bad didn't bother with proofreading. Dictionaries were rarely consulted and using them was regarded as slightly suspect. When changes were made, they were done so immediately, usually after unintentional slips of the pen. Correcting fluid was very popular with some students and in the fourth form class a small bottle was often passed around the room surreptitiously to those who wanted to use it. In the third form class, corrections were usually made by crossing out and writing the new word above.

'Right' first time

Drafting (preparing an initial copy of a piece of writing), was also rare and was universal only once, in a 'formal' letter-writing exercise in third form English. In the third form class, Irene and Kate rarely began with drafts, while James and Leon did not use them at all. In the fourth form class, none of the students made drafts. Some of the female students, however, wrote out an unaltered version twice, first in pencil on to loose leaves, later word by word, in their exercise books. Anne said that she liked to 'write it up properly afterwards'. Linda occasionally took notes in shorthand which she then transcribed fully. This was the closest to making drafts that any of the fourth formers attained.

Making notes

When students were engaged in notetaking, the usual practice was for actual phrases from the source to be loosely strung together. Students rarely attempted to summarize material in their own words. No student wrote draft versions and then edited them; all wrote directly into their exercise books. Students made little or no effort to amend their own notes, even when the class discussion suggested that they had misinterpreted a point or omitted an important piece of information.

Not revising

Revisions (altering relatively large blocks of content) were not observed either. Once, in the fourth form class, a few stories written by the students were read out

aloud to the whole class. It is possible that Tania's reaction, after hearing the teacher read out her story, provides a clue as to why revision was not undertaken by the students: 'When you read it I could tell that some parts should have been different, but not when I wrote it'. There was very little opportunity for students to listen to each other's imaginative writing, though it must be remembered that such writing occurred very infrequently in any case.

(D) Problems

You have to do it

While some of the students seemed to enjoy writing, such as one fourth former whose major problem seemed to be preventing her baby sister from eating the corners of projects she was completing at home, others disliked having to write. When asked why, they gave replies such as, 'It's too hard', 'Writing is boring', and 'I don't know enough about it'. Even the prolific and competent writers often appeared to find writing a chore: 'There's always something you have to hand in' and 'You've *got* to write'. Therefore, just being able to write, putting words on the page when requested to do so, *was* a problem for some students (see the section 'Productivity').

Ideas and presentation coped with

Despite the difficulty of writing, though, most students appeared to have at least some ideas to write down, even if there were large variations in the quantity and quality of content. Matters of presentation (placement of headings, underlining, margins, and numbering sections of work), were rarely a source of difficulty even though some students were more attentive to presentation than others. Perhaps presentation was easy because the requirements were consistently reinforced by the teachers and, to a large extent, simply entailed following instructions.

Insurmountable problems

Spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and paragraphing presented major problems for some students. Students such as Philip rarely asked for help, because they thought that their difficulties were insurmountable. In general, they were satisfied with their first attempts; it was as if they considered that further effort on their part to improve their current level of performance would be futile.

Talking is easier

Why was this the case? Many students seemed to be overwhelmed by the sheer complexity of the writing process, for reasons hinted at by one of the students who was considered to be a good writer:

> *Writing is work for most kids . . . because you have to think about everything. When you are writing something you have to think about what you're saying, about all the punctuation, spelling and everything like that. When you're saying it, you don't have to worry about these things.*

Writing accurately demands concentration on both the content of the subject written about and the use of language appropriate to that subject; it is possible that some students were unable to cope adequately with both aspects at once. In such cases 'correct' language took second place to the subject matter and the need to write down at least *some* relevant material. After all, if the subject is Science, can the students be blamed for emphasizing the facts of Science as they see them?

Missing proofreading skills

In addition, most students appeared to be still learning how to write well. It has already been pointed out that proofreading occurred infrequently in the classes observed, despite the occasional reminder from some of the teachers to students about the need to read over their writing carefully. Some students, therefore, may not have known *how* to proofread even when asked to do it (though presumably they could learn), simply because they had received insufficient practice in applying the appropriate techniques. As a result, their writing continued to have language-related mistakes in it.

Lack of time for developing language skills?

Other students may have lacked the skills of self-appraisal and objectivity necessary to carry out proofreading or an evaluation of the adequacy of their own writing. Teacher comments occasionally reminded them of their writing difficulties, but these students may have been so bogged down (such as Philip with his spelling) that only a superhuman intervention on the part of their teachers would be able to bring about gradual improvements. Teaching these students proofreading skills may have been futile, because their writing required intensive, prolonged, individual attention by teachers aware of language learning processes and with the necessary time to do it. Such ideal conditions are rare in any educational setting.

(E) The Students' Approaches to Written Work: A Summary

Summary

(i) Many students thought writing was difficult or boring and some seemed overwhelmed by the effort required.

(ii) Students varied widely in the amount of writing they completed from day to day. While some wrote a few words or lines, others wrote up to two pages or more in an hour.

(iii) Work habits varied. Some students steadily progressed through each step of a writing task, while others left writing till the last possible moment. Some seemed unconcerned about completing writing tasks.

(iv) Many students spent more time on the presentation of individual writing tasks than on the writing itself.

(v) On the whole, pupils worked independently and after discussion there was little interaction with the teacher. Students sometimes exchanged ideas with each other.

(vi) Proofreading was rarely observed. As a rule students did not seem to check over their written work, and there were wide variations in accuracy of language usage.

(vii) Those students who wrote the least tended to have major problems, such as very poor spelling or an inadequate grasp of the concepts involved in a particular topic.

II How Do Teachers of 13- and 14-Year-Olds Use Writing in their Subjects?

(A) Mastering Subject Content: Writing as Thinking

Subject knowledge

The content (English, Science or Social/Economic Studies) for which the teachers were responsible received more attention than the teaching of writing itself. Teaching time was organised around the knowledge that the students were expected to acquire, and activities were planned to interpret and manipulate this knowledge. As writing tasks were but one element of this process, written work tended to be a by-product.

Teachers' suggestions

Writing was generally used to stimulate ideas (English and Social/Economic Studies) or to record information (Science). It required a moderately high level of thinking from the students themselves, even though the teachers clearly outlined the required tasks first and, through lengthy discussions and suggestions written on the board, often provided ideas before the students began writing. The most important feature of each piece of writing was its content, and that was usually predetermined by the teacher. As a result, the ideas were regarded as more significant than the language used to express them, or the format adopted in presenting them, despite the students' emphasis on layout.

Extending thinking through writing

Writing was seen as one of the primary methods, if not the main one, for helping students to extend their own *thinking*. At certain points in some lessons, therefore, the teachers assisted their students to clarify their views towards a particular topic or issue by asking them to jot down some ideas. The third form English teacher, for example, wanted the students to be 'uninhibited about putting their ideas on paper'. The fourth form English teacher had a similar purpose:

> *Often I will get them to jot down notes to help them focus their ideas. I place a lot of importance on oral work and hope that it rubs off onto written work where they can justify what they have to say. I want to get them into the habit of justifying things in a written way.*

The fourth form Social/Economic Studies teacher shared this aim, too: 'I use writing to get the pupils doing something when only half of them are thinking'. In such instances the ideas expressed by the students took precedence and notes (collections of phrases or incomplete sentences) were considered acceptable.

Writing as a means to an end

Naturally, the writing was of most interest to the teachers as an indication of how well the content was understood, or of the students' ability to follow instructions (e.g., 'Write an introductory paragraph to an expository essay', in fourth form English). When asked which aspects of the students' writing gave cause for concern the fourth form English teacher said:

> *It's not so much the grammatical, technical things. It's if the pupils haven't grasped the specific thing we're looking at, at that particular moment. For example, when they were writing a story about death some hadn't grasped that we were getting at mood. I don't think I get them to write just for the sake of writing.*

Covering the ground adequately

Assessment of students' written work, therefore, tended to reflect these central concerns. When checking students' writing in class the fourth form Social/Economic Studies teacher looked for 'analytical skills, the ability to classify, to categorize, i.e., pattern-finding'. When assigning marks to the students' folders of work the fourth form English teacher checked what the students had done chiefly for its comprehensiveness of content. He looked for work that had been set during the preceding weeks and based the final grade on three or four key exercises to which the students were expected to make a considerable personal contribution, rather than the sets of notes or summary paragraphs taken from comments listed on the blackboard. The main criterion for a high mark was that the student had covered the set tasks in a reasonably thorough manner. Similarly, the third form English teacher reserved 40 percent of the marks (for a long-term project) for completing the discrete components of the task.

(B) Tasks Set: Writing to Meet Teacher Requirements

Brief in length

On a day-to-day basis, tasks requiring writing followed a consistent pattern. Most were relatively brief. In Science, at both class levels, short sentences or single-word responses were all that was required. Also, much of the notetaking was direct copying or, if in the pupils' own words, adapted minimally from a booklet supplied. In Social/Economic Studies, at both levels, writing tasks rarely consisted of more than two or three sentences. Although the writing tasks in English were more varied, most writing still involved short responses, as answers to questions set by the teacher, and were usually only a few sentences in length.

Time allowed for writing

The written work was not *always* tightly prescribed or of a brief nature. Occasionally, students were given tasks which required more extensive writing, chiefly in English (at both levels) but also in Social/Economic Studies. However, 'essays' were less than 5 percent of the students' writing in both the third and fourth form classes. Interestingly, more time was allowed for written work in the third form class (just over 50% of each period observed) than in the fourth form class (about 40%). More interesting still, more writing occurred in Science than in either English or Social/Economic Studies.

Assisting the students

The general pattern for nearly all writing was for the teacher to explain to the students what they had to do, to guide the class's discussion of the task(s) and then to leave the students to complete the task(s) independently. All the teachers moved about the classroom at times dealing with students' queries, and sometimes made encouraging comments in passing or provided extra motivation for some students. In particular, if individuals said they were uncertain about *what* they had to do, teachers gave assistance readily about the nature of the tasks. Also, if students appeared to be bogged down the teachers sometimes provided gentle encouragement. For example, the third form English teacher said: 'What I do is sit down next to them and I'll try to get them expressing their ideas and I write them down. Some of them just can't order their ideas'.

(C) Commenting Upon the Students' Writing

A supportive climate

All of the teachers understood the need to encourage their students to learn in a positive rather than in a punitive manner. At this school, developing and maintaining a warm and secure classroom environment was considered essential not just for

writing but for all classroom activities. As the fourth form English teacher said:

> *It is always easy to criticise or attack a student's work or abilities, but it often requires considerable effort and patience to be positive. Moreover, the aim of developing and praising a student's strengths, rather than constantly highlighting his or her weaknesses, is a key principle at our school.*

This perception may explain why the teachers avoided drawing constant attention to those aspects of their students' writing which were recurrent problems.

'Overlooking' language difficulties

Many students, for example, were consistently poor spellers, or used a barely legible style of handwriting, or were unable to express their thoughts on a topic in a clear and coherent manner. But they were largely left to their own devices to improve those aspects of their writing which were giving them difficulty. Why? It was difficult to find time for those struggling; 'correct' or appropriate usage was often considered less important than the quality or number of ideas; and the teachers did attempt to be 'positive'. The third form English teacher put it well:

> *I think it is very demoralising for a student who is perhaps super on ideas but has difficulty either with spelling or even with the fundamental writing task. I think it is very damaging to simply get back work the whole time which has corrections scrawled throughout.*

Feedback

When circulating around the classroom (though this occurred rarely), teachers did answer specific inquiries. But pupils did not receive much immediate feedback on either the content or form of their writing as written work was formally collected about once a month or, more rarely, once a fortnight. Detailed written feedback was rare. In the third form English class, pupils received a comprehensive assessment of the long-term project, covering aspects such as language, content, organisation and presentation. However, for Social/Economic Studies and Science at both levels, and fourth form English, it was unusual for students to receive such details. They obtained a positive global comment and a series of ticks for satisfactory work. Occasionally, when a student had not completed a task, this was drawn to the student's attention (e.g., 'Where are the answers to these questions?'), but generally very few errors were corrected or commented upon.

(D) Writing Appropriately

Teaching writing skills

Writing, therefore, was not 'taught'; the teachers tended to expect their students already to possess and be capable of using writing and associated language skills in their subject-areas. This was not an unreasonable expectation as most of the students coped adequately with the written work they were required to carry out. It was different for those students who experienced difficulties of some kind, however, as there appeared to be little awareness of the problems they encountered while they were engaged in the *process* of writing. Perhaps this suggests that much more instruction in how to teach writing skills is needed.

Appropriate language usage

Instead of an interest in how to write, most teachers, particularly English teachers, were concerned about the appropriateness of language for different purposes. The fourth form English teacher wrote:

> *I'm trying to develop certain skills in the (NESC) modes. Writing is not something given deliberate focus to, in the sense of 'today is writing, tomorrow shaping'. Subconsciously, I'm aware of what I'm trying to do, e.g., to get the pupils to punctuate, but I don't think 'this is the week I'm going to do punctuation'.* I do push the idea that different kinds of language are appropriate on different occasions. *For example, if they're writing a letter to the editor, they can't write it with errors, so punctuation will come in there; with a newspaper report using direct speech, speech marks will come in there. And I do have concerns, depending on what the situation is, the area I'm looking at. For example, essay writing: if they hadn't been able to get down notes or write an introductory paragraph that would have worried me.*

As a result, writing was seen mainly as a tool for putting down notes or for recording thoughts on specific topics. Little emphasis was placed on correct language usage; much was put on the ideas or content written in words; writing was used for thinking and learning, rather than as an end in itself.

(E) The Teaching of Writing: A Summary

Summary

(i) Nearly all tasks requiring writing were clearly outlined by the teachers before the students began writing, often with considerable prior discussion and notes on the blackboard to provide ideas.

(ii) A lot of guidance was provided by the teachers when *setting* writing tasks, but students were only helped, once they were engaged in writing down their ideas or notes, if they required assistance.

(iii) Most writing tasks were very brief, up to two or three sentences in length, and were of a descriptive/factual nature.

(iv) Formal assessment was infrequent, and the main concern seemed to be that students had covered the necessary work sufficiently. There was little detailed written feedback once tasks were completed.

(v) Because the teachers tried not to be overly critical of students, persistent writing difficulties were often tolerated rather than constantly commented upon in order not to dishearten individual writers.

(vi) Teachers were mostly concerned with students' grasp of their subject (the use of appropriate ideas and topics) rather than correct language usage.

(vii) Emphasis was placed on appropriate language usage for a particular context rather than on the deliberate teaching of discrete writing skills.

(viii) Writing was chiefly used as a method of recording facts, to extend students' thinking, and as an indication of the level of understanding of particular topics.

III Where to Next?

There appears to be a sense of urgency associated with the use of written language at the third and fourth form level. Take a good writer like Mark, who said, for example, 'I don't go over my writing to find mistakes... I'm more interested in the ideas and getting them down'. He found it difficult to review his work. What chance then have slow writers like Philip? Despite the assistance he was offered, when under pressure, Philip was not able to write effectively. When asked what aspect of his writing he was most happy with, he replied: 'None really. I'm really quite hopeless at it.'

Surely Philip can be helped. Do we need writing workshops in schools run by writing specialists? At present, they would be working in very 'ad hoc' ways since research into the process of writing has advanced only a few steps. Research may provide teachers and pupils with the clues they are seeking, but despite a century of widespread literacy, and concerted international research on writing since 1980, it is early days yet.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the teachers and pupils who took part in the study on which these comments are based for their patient co-operation and interest, and also Neil Reid, NZCER for carrying out some of the observations referred to in this article.

Footnote

A more detailed account of the study on which this article is based, and a complementary study of observations made in two intermediate classrooms (a form 1 and a form 2) can be found in the research report entitled *A Month's Writing in Four Classrooms*. It is available from NZCER, P.O. Box 3237, Wellington for $10.00.

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GRAMMAR

A Working Knowledge

Katy Simmons
Oxford Polytechnic

'Pupils need to know about the workings of the English language.' That seems a good idea. And the quote is from a British Minister of Education, Kenneth Baker. However, he went on to suggest, and even insist, that grammar be taught. Was that a good idea?

There have been several reports in Britain of children failing grammar tests. Is that surprising? Try yourself on this one:

Is the following correct? If not, why not?

Who are you talking to?

Sounds all right? But grammatically prepositions govern the oblique case. So *to* requires *whom*. So the pedantic want you to say

Whom are you talking to?

and the ultra pedantic insist on

To whom are you talking?

But you know, and I know, that *Who are you talking to?* is perfectly good 1990s English. I bet Kenneth Baker uses it every day.

Perhaps we are not asking the right questions. Do pupils know about the workings of the English language already? My work with some 12-year-olds in a local comprehensive school suggests that children know more about language than we assume.

I wanted to investigate children's awareness of the differences between what we say and what we read – the spoken and the written word. To that end, I first showed the children a series of pictures and asked them to tell a story about what they had seen. The stories were recorded on tape and were later transcribed *verbatim*, so that, for the next session, each child had a copy of every story. Here are two of the stories:

One day the village yobbos went down to the village to the telephone box and dared each other to phone the fire brigade. When the firemen came they looked around wondering what was wrong. He saw one of the children. Two of the yobbos legged it down the street. The firemen were very angry and they wondered who was to blame. They caught two of the children and asked who did it. They started to argue so they took them to their parents.

Matthew

There's these three... er... four children called Tom, Wayne, Roger and Lucy and they all phoned up the fire brigade as a laugh in the telephone box and when the fire brigade came they hid everywhere they could, not far away so they could see what happens but they got caught as two were trying to run away the other two got caught. The passer-by saw the fire brigade catching them and the passer-by said, 'I know where they live' and took them home to their parents and they got sent to bed.

Wayne

At the beginning of the next session, the children read through all the stories. Were they, I asked, the sort of stories we might find written in a book?

The children's response was immediate and emphatic. There were, they said, many things that needed to be changed. The discussion that followed revealed that they had considerable understanding of the structures of the written language, in particular, of the way in which it differed from the spoken language.

The children were aware of many issues. They immediately set to work 'tidying up' the stories, cutting out muddles, eliminating repetitions, and putting in full stops. But their understanding went much further than this and discussion showed their grasp of several major grammatical issues:

- sensitivity to 'appropriate' language – they discussed at some length whether 'yobbos' and 'legging it' were the kinds of words they might find in a book. Opinion was divided: while all agreed that such words were informal, some children felt that they added a sense of immediacy to the story;
- sensitivity to ambiguity – the children realised that, in spoken language, context and gesture indicate who 'they' are in any story. In the written language, however, the writer has to be more specific, in order to make the story clearer to the reader;
- awareness of syntax – the children pointed out that, in the second story, 'the passer-by' had not been mentioned before and should therefore be '*a* passer-by';
- awareness of tense – the children were quick to spot inconsistencies and showed a sound grasp of present and past tense.

As well as these specific textual alterations, the children were conscious of the whole structure of the narrative. 'There should be a proper start, shouldn't there, Miss?' said Wayne, promptly inserting 'Once upon a time' into his story.

The level of understanding shown by these children is perhaps surprising, in the light of recent research findings. Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that all the children who took part in my study had considerable reading difficulties and were in the special needs unit of their school.

It is true that they probably could not have given grammatical reasons for the changes they were making, nor have used precise terms to describe what they had written.

But they did have considerable understanding of the structure of their language: they could use their language effectively and understood how language changed in different contexts. Their implicit knowledge of language was considerable: we should bear this finding in mind as we read the more negative research reports.

Note

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Does Instruction in English Grammar Improve Writing Skills?

ACCORDING to a three-year study sponsored by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, the study of grammar at secondary schools has no measurable impact on children's writing skills.

In a large co-educational secondary school the language development of 250 pupils was examined closely over a period of three years while they were instructed in three contrasting language programmes. Two groups studied the Oregon English Curriculum, one with, and the other without, the course in transformational-generative grammar. The third group studied a typical English course, using P.R. Smart's textbook series, *Let's Learn English*, which incorporates a more traditional approach to grammar. All groups were taught by the same teachers, who collaborated regularly to standardise their teaching procedures as far as possible. The non-grammar group spent the extra time in reading and creative writing.

At the beginning of the experiment, in Form 3, all groups showed equal achievement in reading, vocabulary, mental ability, and formal language skills. A comprehensive evaluation was made at the end of Forms 3, 4, and 5 (Years 8, 9, 10), and a follow-up study in Form 6, after the groups had merged. In addition to careful analysis of essay writing, the spelling, study skills, formal usage, sentence combining, and attitudes to various aspects of their English programmes were examined.

A careful assessment of each pupil's eleven essays showed no significant differences in quality or quantity, style or vocabulary in any of the three years of the experiment. The non-grammar pupils were writing just as clearly, imaginatively, and correctly as the two grammar groups after three years without any formal study of sentence analysis, phrases, clauses, and the like.

Similarly there were only minor differences in the other language skills assessed, and no differences in School Certificate English, or a follow-up test in Form 6. The grammar groups were more negative in their attitudes at the end of the experiment, and saw English as less useful and less interesting than the non-grammar pupils.

Previous overseas research had shown little or no benefit for pupils who studied traditional grammar, but the practical value of transformational-generative grammar was still an open question. It should be stated that the writers of the Oregon Curriculum justify its inclusion in the course on non-utilitarian grounds.

In discussing the conclusions of the study, the writers of this report point out that teachers who defend the teaching of grammar in secondary schools must now do so in humanitarian rather than practical terms, for, as presently taught, it seems to have little impact on the writing skills of typical pupils.

Elley W.B., Barham, I.H., Lamb, H., and Wyllie, M., Abstract from "The Role of Grammar in a Secondary School English Curriculum", *N.Z. Journal of Educational Studies*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 1975.

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Item 7

Encouraging Writing

THE BEST OF SAT Writing

Helping Pupils to Enjoy the Writing Process

By David Philips
NZCER

Writing and Schools

Writing and going to school are intimately linked in the minds of many people. The second 'R', even more than reading, is regarded as a particularly school-like activity, and images of pupils huddled over desks gripping their pens, scrawling out lines on a clean page, readily spring to mind. The twin notions that pupils write a great deal at school, and that they go to school mainly to learn to write, are difficult to dislodge and have an almost mythical quality about them. There seems to be no truth in the first assumption, however, while the second one misconstrues the purpose of both schools and learning to write.

Applebee, for example, after undertaking a study of the teaching of writing in secondary schools in the United States concluded that even in English classes – supposed bastion of writing – only 10 percent of class time was devoted to writing of at least a paragraph in length, and even when pupils were writing, the most frequently used tasks were very mechanical in nature, being restricted largely to note-taking and short answers rather than more extended pieces of writing. Spencer, examining the writing of Scottish secondary school pupils, discovered that half of the writing done was copied or dictated work, a quarter was only up to two sentences long while the remaining quarter alone was over a paragraph in length and in the pupils' own words. These studies suggest that there appears to be little basis, therefore, for the belief that a lot of writing is done, at least in high schools, while such findings may confirm Martin's view that the 'potential contribution (of writing) to the mental, emotional and social development of the writer is being neglected'.

Writing is one of many activities pupils undertake at school, of course, but one which a large number find difficult and approach with reluctance. It is possible that the traditional approach to writing has been partly responsible for such lack of enthusiasm: pupils are given writing tasks by their teachers, required to produce pieces of writing, usually alone, with a minimum of guidance, and the papers are then corrected by the teacher with very little comment. Such an approach, it seems, does little to encourage writing in the classroom.

However, in the past decade views of writing in schools have started to change radically. Emphasis is now being placed on the whole process of writing rather than the correction of a single instantly produced copy. This new approach can best be described by answering these questions: Why should writing be encouraged? What research findings about writing do you need to bear in mind? How can you give individual pupils more positive support with their writing activities and development?

Why Should Writing Be Encouraged in Schools?

Just as not everyone reads, not everyone writes. But for the vast majority of people, writing is an essential activity on a great number of occasions and for a great number of purposes.

1. *Writing is an essential vocational skill and an integral part of the new technology.* While some people are unlikely to write much during their lifetime, apart perhaps from filling in forms, writing (whether memos, letters or reports) is an indispensable element of a large number of vocations. If you can't write, you exclude yourself from the most important form of comunication used in all realms of business, in all the professions and, at times, in most other occupations. Microcomputers, far from diminishing the usefulness of writing, increase its importance because of their interactive nature. In effect they change the means of transcription but not the skills needed for composing and thinking.
2. *Writing assists personal development.* Writing can be used in order to explore one's feelings and views about human relationships, personal problems and daily events, whether in the form of letters, diaries or notes. The 'expressive' function of writing, discussed at length by Britton and others in the 1970s, is now well-documented but often over-looked. In some cases, writing can act as a form of therapy whereby the

'patient' reveals the contents of dreams or hidden worries, tensions or crises which have not been coped with in the past.

3. *Writing assists intellectual growth.* It is often said that 'writing is thinking'. In order to write, the pupil/writer has to be able to think on a variety of levels. Glatthorn, for example, in discussing the composing process suggests why this is so. The composing process is:
   a. complex, involving memory, cognition, language and pyschomotor behaviour;
   b. multiphased, involving different stages and many subprocesses (e.g., exploring/planning, drafting, revising, 'publishing');
   c. recursive and interactive with stages which overlap, relate closely to each other, and affect each other.

   Writing, therefore, demands a considerable level of intellectual skill. In thinking about a topic and writing about it, apart from developing these skills, pupils can extend their awareness of issues, processes and people.

4. *Writing is essential for social purposes.* Without writing, many social functions could not take place to quite the same extent that they do now. The creation of ideas to be shared with others is based largely on writing: books, magazines and newspapers are an indispensable part of work and recreation for many people and someone has to write them. Letters, whether to convey business or personal information, are an integral part of our society.

5. *Writing is a key method of learning.* Despite the apparent lack of extended writing in high schools overseas, writing is still a predominant means of learning in schools. Through different kinds of writing pupils can interact with information, and concepts, and develop attitudes which will assist their learning. Whether for good or bad, skill in writing is one of the measures used for academic success in our school system. All pupils, therefore, must be encouraged to develop their writing skills to whatever extent they are able. Some suggestions about how this can be done are provided in the next section.

Any one of these reasons alone would be sufficient to justify the teaching of writing in schools, or any carefully conceived attempt to improve the teaching of writing.

What Do You Need to Know About Writing in Order to Help Pupils Write Better?

1. *Writing is a process.* According to some of the most important researchers of the past decade, most notably Graves (with young writers), writing consists of various interlinked stages (see Glatthorn above). Briefly, writing requires *rehearsal* (exploring ideas and thoughts about what to write), *drafting* (putting those ideas onto paper) and *revising* (reordering, changing words, correcting mistakes). Finally, the written product is *shared* or 'published' in some way, unless written for purely personal reasons, with the audience for whom the writing was intended. Such findings are supported by Petrosky, who states that prewriting experiences help students to write better, and Bamberg, who considers that revision is vital in improving writing.

   Consequently, it is important for teachers to allow time for pupils to undertake *all* these activities when they are writing in class and not to expect a single final copy immediately; pupils need time to digest their material. Note that although this approach is rapidly becoming more popular, students in older age groups who were not taught to write using this method may well require careful guidance in order to accept the need for multiple drafts and revision. After all, revisions require a great deal of thinking and a clear grasp of what the piece of writing is designed to convey to actual/potential readers. Often pupils will draft a piece of writing and, because they are expected to produce a final copy, merely write the draft out again in a neater hand, or copy it with very few changes. Many pupils seem not to take the opportunity to revise and may require guidance in learning how to carry out appropriate checks. If they have the incentive of 'publication' pupils are more likely to accept the need for multiple drafts. Of course, as Graves himself states, there are a few pupils who do not need to revise simply because they have done a great deal of thinking about their topics before they even begin to write.

2. *The study of formal grammar is not related to improvement in writing and may in fact take time away from the teaching of writing.* Newkirk suggests that most researchers now believe, after extensive studies, that detailed study of grammatical concepts does little, if anything, to encourage the development of writing skills, whatever merit such study might have for other reasons. It is more useful to focus on whatever difficulties students appear to have with their current piece of writing and help them to resolve such problems, than to try to pass on an esoteric body of knowledge which may well be misunderstood or ignored and actually impede the writing process.

3. *There seems to be a relationship between increased reading and improved writing.* According to Haynes, students who read widely learn to write more clearly and fluently, perhaps due to the internalization of knowledge about words, sentences and paragraphs. Pupils should therefore be encouraged to read widely, even though the precise nature of this relationship has yet to be resolved through research.

4. *Peer feedback and peer editing can help bring about improvements in writing.* In Wolter and Lamberg's view, cited by Glatthorn, peer feedback can be useful in helping students to identify problems in their writing and to discover ways to remedy those problems. We need to change the view that pupils should keep writing strictly to themselves; sharing ideas about both the topic and the way it is written with other pupils is likely to be beneficial, once pupils have learned how to comment upon each other's work constructively.

How Can You Encourage Your Pupils to Write Better?

1. *Further your own knowledge of writing.*
   a. Read some of the recent literature on writing so that you become familiar with current views of learning and writing, and pupils' writing development. Bissex's *GNYS AT WRK: A Child Learns to Write and Read* is an excellent account of one child's writing and reading behaviour between the ages of

five and ten. Clay's *What Did I Write?* is a useful discussion of children's first contact with print and the principles of writing which they acquire in their first year or so at school. An account of some of Graves's research is contained in *Donald Graves in Australia*, an enthusiastic protrayal of children in their first two or three years at an elementary school in New Hampshire who were taught using the 'writing process' method, with pupils largely choosing their own topics, adopting a variety of revision practices, and progressively gaining control over their written language skills. See also *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, by Graves.

An influential group from the London Institute of Education have produced some useful books on writing at the secondary level: for example, Britton and others wrote *The Development of Writing Abilities (11–18)* which, despite its limitations, contains an illuminating account of different types of writing. *Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum (11–16)* by Martin and others, and *Understanding Children Writing* by Burgess and others, are still useful guides. More recently, from England, Chilver and Gould have produced *Learning and Language in the Classroom* which focuses on writing in one school at the secondary level and contains samples of a pupil's writing over several years.

b. Try to write as much as possible yourself so that you can personally experience some of the kinds of problems student writers in your classes are likely to encounter. A useful guide, with free writing exercises, is Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers*, which shows how you can start writing even when it seems you have nothing to write about. Reading about how professional writers go about writing can also be instructive.

2. *Try to adopt an enthusiastic approach towards classroom writing activities.* According to Walshe, one of the basics of teaching writing is the value the teacher attaches to it: 'There has to be an enthusiasm for writing. That means a teacher who continually "sells" writing to his or her classes, who knows compelling arguments for the importance of writing in today's society, and who makes an event of most occasions for writing.' And, reinforcing this point, Haynes suggests that the 'single most important thing that teachers of composition can do is to make the writing process a positive experience for all students'.

3. *Encourage writing based on the students' own experience.* Students, irrespective of age or class level, need frequent opportunities to write from their own experience. Graves emphasises that pupils should select their own topics since, in his view, a greater personal commitment to a piece of writing helps to improve its quality. The 'London school' has also argued vigorously for the inclusion of more 'expressive' writing, that is, writing stemming from the pupil's personal experience, at the secondary level.

4. *Foster in pupils the need for revision and self-editing.* Pupils need to learn how to appraise their own work. While it is difficult to learn how to revise, a supportive teacher can assist this activity greatly. What this means for teaching practice is a change from the teacher's role as chief editor to one in which the pupils are encouraged to become their own editors, with teacher suggestions throughout the writing process. The view that discussion is only legitimate (1) before the pupils begin writing and (2) once the writing has been completed and a mark put on the student's piece of writing, is insufficient. It needs to be supplemented by a view which allows teacher/pupil and pupil/pupil interaction through the writing process. Students should be treated as 'real' writers, which they are, though beginners, and shown how to go about writing the way professional writers do.

5. *Provide a variety of audiences and a range of writing purposes.* Writing tasks should always be genuine communication. According to Martin it is essential to 'make a conscious effort to provide pupils with an audience which enables them to write what they really think... [to write] for a reader.. who will pay real regard to the way it looks through their eyes. We believe that it is just as important for the teacher to provide this kind of sympathetic audience in subjects such as history, geography and science as it is in the traditionally "personal" subjects such as English...' There seems little point in having pupils write for an unknown audience or for a teacher who will merely quickly skim through the pupil's efforts in order to mark or correct them. A careful appraisal is required of the kinds of writing pupils will require once they have left school, but there are many others which can be used in class to develop writing skills. (See, for example, the suggestions of Hipple and others.)

6. *Make regular use of conferences with pupils.* There is an art in reacting to pupils' writing. Errors, for example, should be viewed as necessary aspects of growth. There is little point in correcting all the pupils' 'mistakes' if the same ones are made over and over again. It is more productive to use conferences (that is, personal one-to-one chats with pupils) in which specific aspects of the pupils' writing can be discussed with reference to examples of their own writing. As a general principle, according to Hillerich, 'children learn to write better when praised than when criticised. This has been demonstrated in studies from elementary levels all the way through high school... These studies compared children who received praise with those who received "correction" as red marks on papers. The findings indicated that those who received praise without criticism wrote more, had more creative ideas, enjoyed writing more, and usually made *fewer* mechanical errors in capitalization, punctuation and spelling.'

7. *Set up writing resource centres.* If possible, it is a good idea to set up in each classroom (or perhaps a special room) an area which is designed specifically for writing, furnished with appropriate resource materials (equipment such as pens, typewriter, paper, references, charts for display or shelves for writing folders) which pupils can use for their own writing projects. In addition, visits from professional writers can be organised, but not simply to give readings from their works – rather to run writing workshops in which pupils can discuss their views on writing, show pieces that they are working on and generally obtain guidance and friendly encouragement without fear of negative criticism. Such visits are as informative for first-year pupils as for those in their final years at high school.

8. *Develop a school-wide 'policy' on writing.* Clearly, writing is required in most school subjects, not just English. Each school should obtain some kind of consensus among its teachers on such aspects as the purpose of writing in the school, the specific activities to be encouraged, how much writing should be done and teachers' own attitudes towards writing. Consequently, the role of writing assessment needs to be carefully worked out too. Writing as learning should take precedence over, but be balanced with, writing as 'testing'. Glatthorn has many useful observations to make about developing writing programmes in schools.
9. *Encourage students to write often.* Although research suggests that mere frequency of writing is not associated with improvement pupils have to *write* in order to become skilled writers. But more important than the actual amount of writing is how writing is regarded by the pupils and the teachers. According to Haynes: ' Teachers should give greater emphasis to the guiding and careful development of a limited number of papers, with attention given to... the solving of communication problems before and during the writing process, rather than on the hurried production of a great number of papers.' Accepting the writing process approach implies that pupils should have as much control over their own writing as possible, but accompanied by positive help from you. Haley-James, however, considers that frequent writing is more likely to encourage learning.

Looking to the Future: Using Computers for Writing.

One exciting new development which promises to be of considerable use for writers in schools is the word processor. Much interest has arisen recently over the applications of the new technology for writers (see, for example, Cronnell and Humes, Schwartz, Bradley and Moran). The computer has several advantages over handwriting, including speed and neatness. But more than that, it is particularly well-adapted for teaching writing according to the writing process approach, since the very features of writing which make that approach attractive – the emphasis on discovery, exploration, active learning and improvisation – are readily catered for by the computer.

According to Schwartz: 'Given what current research tells us about composing, particularly revision, this machine seems both psychologically and technologically suited to help the writer write more and risk more and achieve more fully developed writing.' The ability of the computer to quickly print out legible drafts in multiple copies irrespective of the number of alterations which have been made to the original 'text' gives it a big advantage over the slower method of transcribing ideas by pen on paper. And, in an ideal writing resource centre equipped with several word-processors, pupils could practice writing, particularly their revision skills. Computers have another advantage too: they can reduce initial fears of making mistakes and encourage in pupils a greater willingness to explore meaning 'in print'. Papert has observed children going from 'total rejection of writing to an intense involvement accompanied by rapid improvement of quality within a few weeks of learning to write with a computer'.

Graves stresses that 'writing is a craft and we must teach it as the crafts are taught: in studio or workshop conditions'. The microcomputer with its word-processing capabilities may become the writing workshop of the future. It is the most significant improvement in the technology of writing since the invention of the pen, and may replace the pen as a symbol of the writer's craft. What better way to encourage pupils' writing?

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Writing with Word Processors:

The Computer's Impact on Writing Quality, Composing Processes and Classroom Interactions

By Ilana Snyder
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I enjoy writing with the word processor because it is easy to work with.

Computers are great. They're a change from using pens and the essays are always readable. You can move paragraphs with ease and still have a neat looking page, and you can get as many copies as you want.

If I had to choose, I would choose to use the computer because it's quicker, and you don't have to take a lot of time writing rough drafts.

Writing with a word processor is exciting. These days I find writing with pen dull. I used to hate these mechanical things, but now I find them fun.

I like writing with computers because I find that I can think about what I'm writing and rephrase it in my mind as I type.

These comments, recorded by Year Eight (Form 3) students in their electronic writing journals, suggest that computers equipped with word processing programs can make writing less laborious and more enjoyable.

Those of us already using computers for writing, either at home or in the classroom, recognise their potential as sophisticated tools and as an exciting component of a dynamic learning environment. We like to talk about how we made the change from typewriter or pen to computer. We enjoy discussing its impact on how and what we write. We also have theories about how computers functioning as word processors affect our classrooms and our students' writing.

Writers using word processors for writing can draft, redraft, add, delete, rearrange and edit on the screen or from paper copy, turning out different versions of texts and finished products on a printer. Word processors can eliminate recopying. Their use can, perhaps, stimulate planning, composing and revising, in other words, 'thinking'. Clearly, when word processors are used, the writing classroom and the writing curriculum become subject to new scrutiny and new questions.

However, if we are going to successfully integrate word processors into our language-arts writing programmes, we require more than anecdotal reports about their effects. In order to maximise the tool's benefits and to minimise the impact of its limitations, we need answers to three critical questions:

(1) What happens to social interactions in word-processing classrooms?
(2) What happens to students' writing processes when they are used?
(3) What happens to the quality of the texts produced?

The findings of the study reported in this article present responses to these questions. But before that it is important to know what has been happening in computer writing research.

What research on writing and word processing tells us

Studies have investigated computers' impact on revision processes, on writing quality, and on attitudes to writing. Only a few studies have looked at their effects on the classroom itself. A small number of studies have examined the influence of word processors on the writing of experienced and professional writers.

An assumption underlying most of the research is that word processors are a boon to writers. That appears logical: a tool which eliminates the need for laborious recopying and which makes revision easier, frees the writer to attend to problems of a higher order - in other words, there is more time for thinking and reflecting.

Yet the results do not always confirm what many of us intuitively believe. It is often found that student writers using word processors make only surface changes to their texts, and not changes which affect meaning. The studies which have investigated quality are more equivocal. Some have found significant improvement; some have found no improvement at all.

Attitudes to computer writing have been found generally positive and increases in enthusiasm are usually accompanied by growth in competence and confidence with the technology. In the classroom, there is generally an increase in co-operation and collaboration. Finally, case studies of professional writers suggest that writers respond in idiosyncratic ways; habits established before using word processors shape the ways in which experienced writers adapt to the technology.

Implications

What does this mixed bag of findings mean for both the researcher and the language-arts teacher?

We need to learn more about writing processes (other than revision strategies) associated with the use of word processors. We need greater understanding of the social context of the classroom in which computers are used for writing. And, as the findings of the quality-focused studies are inconclusive, we still need to know what happens to writing quality.

The design of the study

My research investigated those three critical aspects of the writing situation - writing context, process, and product - in the one study. So the study had a number of dimensions. It compared two groups of students, over 8 months, one using pens and the other computers. In contrast to earlier, quality-focused research, this study sampled a number of types of writing. The three genres were Narrative, Argument, and Expository Report. They were selected as they represent the main varieties of writing expected of students in school. By sampling more than one genre it was possible (a) to make a more complete assessment of students' overall writing performance, and (b) to explore whether word processors are more suited to certain genres than to others. For example, word processors are used by almost every journalist and editor, yet some novelists and poets have declared that they could not, and would not, use them.

Thus I was investigating whether the use of word processors produced more effective texts than traditional tools, namely pens and pencils. The study also considered the impact of the electronic tool on the writer's planning, composing and revising processes. Thirdly, I was able to study the classroom context in which the teacher and students worked together on the development of students' language and literacy skills.

The participants and the setting

The children were 51 13-year-olds at a Melbourne metropolitan private girls' school. They formed two classes which were equivalent in academic ability. All the students had considerable keyboard and word-processing skills. For the eight months of the study, the word-processing group spent, on average, two lessons a week in the computer rooms. They used Apple IIe computers equipped with the Bank Street Writer Three word-processing program. Each student had access to a computer. The pen group spent an equal amount of time writing in class, but with pens. They had the same teacher, who was an important part of the study.

The writing programme

The writing programme was devised by the teacher and the researcher together. Its overriding aim was to create an environment in which students were engaged with writing. Students were taught to recognise different genre, to respond to the different demands of each, and to evaluate their texts critically. They were encouraged to be active in reshaping their writing, and revision was presented as integral to the writing process. An associated objective was for students to understand that revision is rethinking and restructuring. Revision is not just proofreading, which, as language-arts teachers know, is all that most students of this age do, even if they call it 'revision'. Throughout the eight months of the study, the students in both classes were required to complete writing tasks about once every two weeks.

The data

At the beginning of the study and at its conclusion, the students in both groups responded to a questionnaire designed to explore their writing processes. The study also needed writing samples, one in each genre, so at the outset all the students wrote one Narrative, one Argument and one Report, using pens. And at the end of the study, all the students wrote one Narrative, one Argument and one Report, but the pen students used pens and the computer students used word processors. The topics at the end were not the same as those used at the beginning of the study, however, they represented all three genres and were as equal as possible in demand and difficulty.

To explore the two teaching/learning contexts, the researcher acted as both participant and observer, attending all classes for both groups. Observations of the teacher, her teaching approach, and her interaction with the students in both groups were recorded. Observations of how the students behaved and their social interactions were also recorded. The students kept journals, and at the end of the study were asked to evaluate the writing programme. The researcher and the teacher discussed the project, formally and informally, throughout the eight months.

The written texts

Experienced teachers evaluated the samples. These were all typed and printed so that the markers did not know whether a piece was written with pen or word processor or whether it was written at the beginning of the study or at its end. (Care was taken to ensure that the students' errors were retained.) Length, syntactic complexity, and precision were calculated. Most important was the difference in quality between pen and word processor; quality was assessed with global general impression marks.

What the study found

The comparison of the two classrooms

Both classrooms were productive learning environments in which students were taught genre-based writing strategies by the same skilled teacher. However, the computer classroom emerged as more student-centred and less teacher-dominated. In the computer classroom, the teacher was more clearly a learner in a learning community, modelling the process of learning. There was less talk, but when it occurred it was more work-focused and task-oriented, and the teacher was more of an adviser and an editor than in the pen classroom.

At the same time, the technology imposed a variety of new demands on the teacher. The teacher had to be prepared to modify approaches which may have worked in the pen classroom, but seemed inappropriate in the computer context. There seemed to be less time to teach genre-based writing strategies. The computer setting seemed to invite writing: it was as if the machines beckoned the students to use them. The students were more engaged in the writing process. Overall, the computer classroom was more interactive, co-operative and collaborative.

Students' writing processes

The children were taught, or had developed on their own, important beginning strategies, planning techniques, conferencing patterns and approaches to revising. Contrary to my expectations, the use of different writing tools had minimal impact on these writing processes.

It was interesting to note that whether the students wrote with pen or word processor, they planned the least for Narrative, more for Report, and the most for Argument. The students in both groups discussed drafts with the teacher (conferencing) when working on all three types of writing. When they revised Narrative, the students were more concerned with surface changes. When they revised

Argument, however, the emphasis was on the clarification of meaning.

Thus it seemed that the students' 'old' writing behaviours persisted when they used the electronic writing tool. It was the genre of the writing task which influenced how the students wrote, while the writing tool, whether pen or computer, appeared to have little impact.

The analysis of the texts

The analysis of the students' texts demonstrated that there were no differences between the two groups in the number of words they produced, nor in the degree of syntactic complexity of the texts. The computer students did not produce longer, nor more complex pieces of writing when they used word processors.

However, analysis of the number of errors indicated that when the computer students used word processors they produced Argument and Report texts with fewer errors than those produced by the pen students. There is something particular to the writing of arguments and reports with a word processor which promoted closer attention to the identification and correction of errors.

In the evaluation of the global quality the teacher-markers awarded the computer students higher marks than the pen students. This is strong evidence: word processing is very effective in promoting quality for all three genres investigated in the study. The evidence was stronger for Argument and Report than for Narrative.

The results demonstrated, therefore, that when students use word processors their written products are affected. They wrote Argument and Report texts which were judged to be of higher quality than those of a similar group using pens.

What is the significance of this finding?

Students are more familiar with structures and conventions of narrative than of argument. They are, after all, exposed to material embodying narrative structure from an early age. What they first read and what they first hear read is narrative. They also hear narratives or stories as part of normal daily conversation. By listening to these stories, children gain insight into narrative structure and how it functions.

However, there is no such training ground in argumentative structures. Children do not read arguments early, nor are arguments read to them. We read children bedtime stories, but we do not read them bedtime arguments. Children may hear arguments, but unlike narrative, it is not so easy to translate the oral structure to the written.

In order to produce a successful argument, the writer must be able to organise all the points generated into a logical structure. But this does not mean that students cannot write arguments until they have reached a high level of cognitive maturation. All young children argue and we know that argument can be grounded in basic experiences. Clearly, it is not necessary to wait until a certain degree of maturation has been achieved before introducing students to the writing of argument. In fact success in writing arguments is more closely connected to the instruction students receive than to their level of cognitive maturation: strategies for developing argument writing skills may be taught.

In fact, this study demonstrates that students aged 13, who are not usually required to produce Arguments, responded enthusiastically to the opportunity. They appreciate classroom instruction in writing Arguments and whether they wrote with pen or word processor, they succeeded in writing competent Argument texts.

Students' experience of expository Report is probably somewhat analogous to that for Narrative. They read reports and hear them. Unlike arguments, the oral structure can be transferred in a relatively straightforward manner to the written. Report writing is likely to be less cognitively demanding and less linguistically complex than either Narrative or Argument. Until the middle years of the school curriculum, at least, a report will most often record events and process concrete observational data. However, in the final years, students may be required to write reports which demand a higher level of abstraction and conceptualisation.

What is important here is that even though it is Narrative with which students are culturally more familiar and at ease, it is Argument and Report writing skills which are ultimately more important for success at school and are central to post-school academic success. There are good reasons, then, for familiarizing students as early as possible with the language needed and the writing choices involved in producing Argument and Report text, thus promoting the early development of skills in this sort of writing.

And the findings of the study indicate that computers help students', achievement in the writing of Arguments and Reports. These students wrote better with computers in Argument and Report and possibly in Narrative as well.

Why did the computer students receive higher marks?

The influence of the teaching-learning context

We can understand why the computer students achieved better scores than the pen students in Argument and Report by considering their marks and the classrooms in which the texts were produced.

Both classrooms were productive learning places. However, even though efforts were made to ensure that the two classrooms were as similar as possible, important differences still emerged. It seemed that genre-based writing strategies (carefully separating Argument, Report, and Narrative) were most successful in a classroom in which the teacher was more peripheral and formal instruction time less, a classroom in which learning was more self-initiated and peer-mediated, a classroom which was more open and relaxed, a classroom in which there was more co-operation and collaboration. We can call this a more open setting, one in which students were more independent and task-oriented. The more open setting was found in the word-processing class. This setting positively influenced the quality of writing. These environmental factors help explain why the writing performance of the computer students was better overall than that of the pen students.

The impact of the electronic writing tool

Word processors in themselves are tools particularly suited to writing development. At the same time the computers helped produce a classroom environment that was collaborative, co-operative and work-focused, an environment which is apparently conducive to the enhancement of genre-based writing strategies. It was the combination of these factors which made it possible for the computer students to achieve higher ground than their pen counterparts.

Implications of the study's findings for language-arts teachers

The study's findings have important implications for both language-arts teachers and language-arts curriculum.

Firstly, the study shows that there is a need to develop teaching strategies uniquely suited to computers. These strategies should take advantage of the greater motivation and increased co-operation and collaboration observed when computers are used for writing.

Secondly, the study confirms that the computer writing classroom can provide an optimum teaching-learning environment. Teachers can set up classrooms in which there is a productive balance between formal teacher input and individualised instruction, between teacher-centred learning and peer-mediated learning. Teachers can take advantage of the increase in learner independence and initiative. When students respond to each other's writing spontaneously, teachers can develop strategies to maximise its effectiveness.

Thirdly, the study's findings indicate that computers are effective for improving students' writing quality. And they are particularly useful for the two genres with which junior-secondary students are less familiar, less confident and less competent, but which are instrumental in determining success at school.

Fourthly, wherever possible, every student in a word-processing language-arts classroom should have access to a computer. The profound impact of the writing tool might have been dissipated if the students had been obliged to share computers. It has been argued, particularly in Great Britain, that one computer in a classroom is all that is needed. Such an argument is trying to offer a rationalization for an unsatisfactory status quo. This study offers evidence that should convince funding bodies to improve the ratio in the interests of better classroom learning for all students.

Acknowledging the potential of computers in language-arts classrooms

Students can be given the chance much earlier to learn the language choices associated with the production of Argument and Report. Moreover, students may be assisted in the development of these writing skills by the use of computers. The combined effects of computers, together with access to the genres which offer more power, challenge entrenched patterns of school success and failure. This is particularly true in schools whose students do not come from literate middle class homes, schools which have traditionally offered students less opportunity to develop skills in these critical genres.

Finally, the computer students were assisted by the use of a powerful writing tool. And the use of that tool affected the social relationships and interactions in the classroom, producing changes which were conducive to the development of collaborative and co-operative behaviour.

Language-arts teachers and also teacher educators cannot afford to remain ignorant of the potential of the computer in the language-arts classroom. Computers provide both students and teachers with a powerful and empowering tool which should be an integral component of the language-arts classroom.

Notes

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The study reported in this article was completed as part of the author's doctoral dissertation. The full title of the thesis is:

Snyder, I.A. (1989) The impact of computers on students' writing: A comparative study of the effects of pens and word processors on writing context, process and product.

Further information about the study may be obtained from Dr. Snyder, or the Main Library at Monash University.

The author thanks Margaret Gill for her invaluable guidance. She also thanks Glen Rowley both for assisting with the statistical model used in the study, and for critically reading a draft of this article.

An overview of the issues and questions explored in the computer writing research literature appears in:

Snyder, I.A. (1987) Writing and computers. English in Australia, 79, 4-10.

Further, Chapter Two of Dr. Snyder's thesis presents a more detailed and updated analysis of the computer writing literature. An article which critically synthesises key elements of the literature is planned for a forthcoming publication.

A range of Year Seven data (final English and Maths marks and stanines and percentile ranks on the ACER Intermediate Test G (1980)) was examined to assess whether the two intact Year Eight classes were equivalent. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups on any of these measures.

A survey of the students' computer expertise and exposure showed that 75 per cent owned computers, and all had used word processors for writing in primary school, with 35 per cent using them every week. More than 75 per cent rated their keyboard and computer writing skills as average and above. All had spent 10 50-minute lessons in the previous year developing keyboard and word-processing skills.

Syntactic complexity was measured by a T-unit analysis after Hunt, K.W. (1965) Grammatical structures written at three grade levels. Research Report No. 3. Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

A T-unit is the 'shortest grammatically allowable' sentence into which a passage of writing can be segmented (Hunt, 1965, p. 21).

The students' writing processes were investigated by comparing the two groups' responses to the questionnaire items which explored writing behaviour. The data were analyzed in order to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between the two groups. There were not.

As with the investigation of the students' writing processes, the texts produced with pens and word processors were compared and tests of statistical significance applied.

The observation that we do not read our children bedtime arguments was made by A.M. Wilkinson in

Wilkinson, A.M. (1986) Argument as a primary act of mind. Educational Review, 38, 2, 127-38.

For those interested in exploring further current thinking on Argument and Narrative and the relationship between the two see

Andrews, A. (Ed.). (1989) Narrative and argument. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

The contention that success in writing Argument is more closely connected to the instruction students experience than to their level of cognitive maturation has been developed by the Australian 'genre linguists'. Publications which present their ideas include

Christie, F. (1989) Genres in writing in ECT418 Language studies: Writing in schools: Study guide (pp. 3-48), Geelong: Deakin University Press.

Kicss, G. (1986) Genre in a social theory of language: Reply to John Dixon. In I. Reid (Ed.) The place of genre in learning: Current debates (pp. 35-45). Geelong: Centre for Studies in Literacy Education, Deakin University.

Martin, J.R. (1985) Factual writing: Exploring and challenging social reality. Geelong: Deakin University Press.

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OWNING YOUR OWN WRITING

By **David Philips**
NZCER

AS WE WRITE we construct knowledge, we manipulate information, we develop ourselves, and we get, as a bonus, the pleasure of authorship. Our writing develops and we use it for a wide range of constructive purposes, including learning.

This present day view of writing is in sharp contrast with the older practice which, in fact if not in theory, saw writing as useful only for getting facts down or for testing what had been learnt in examinations.

The new look also notes that writing has social functions and value, and that it is a personal skill which is acquired somewhat differently by each learner. The words on the paper, video screen, or tape recorder belong to, or are owned by the individual. This article presents some of the more influential views which have helped to bring about this change, and shares some of the findings of a recent research study which Anne O'Rourke and I carried out as part of the New Zealand Writing Project, entitled *Responding Effectively to Pupils' Writing*. Among other things, it looked at how teachers make sure pupils own their own writing.

Writing-process writing

During the early 1980s Donald Graves popularised the notion that children could learn to write more effectively if they followed the same processes as real writers. As a result, through his research on the writing of children aged six to ten years in New Hampshire classrooms he developed an approach to the teaching, learning and evaluation of writing based upon his observations which culminated in the book **Writing: Teachers and Children at Work**. According to Graves, writing consists of the following stages: PRE-WRITING, in which activities related to a particular topic are generated as an aid to determining content and form, often with topics being chosen by the children themselves; DRAFTING, in which a first attempt is made to create a text exploring the topic already discussed in the pre-writing phase; REVISING, when the first draft is changed, either through the author's own efforts, or through peer consultation, or through conferencing with the teacher – at this stage, proofreading is especially important; and PUBLISHING, when the writer's text is made available to a wider audience in a suitable format.

Other important aspects of the writing process include: MODELLING, for example, the teacher might write with the children; SHARING, when extracts or whole pieces at various stages might be read out to the rest of the class, or a group, or a peer; CONFERENCING, when the author's text is closely examined by others to help with improving the text; and EDITING, when the final version of the draft is prepared for publication. These stages, in general, are viewed as mirroring the stages which real writers go through when preparing a piece of writing for publication, although every writer undoubtedly varies in the relative emphasis placed on different stages of the writing process (see, for example, the *Paris Review Writers at Work Series*) and may actually omit some of the activities enshrined in Graves's teaching plan. Graves, then, has attempted to blend what 'real' writers do with his interpretation of how children best develop their writing, in order to create a coherent approach towards the teaching of writing.

The importance of such an approach is that it places special value on what the writer (or author) brings to the process and how individual experiences, perceptions and preferences can become essential ingredients. As a history of writing teaching would reveal, teachers can encourage the development of writing in various ways and with varying degrees of success. Once there was the rote learning of rules, later exposure to the writings of published authors was important; once the teacher directed the choice of topics and made formal evaluations but recently pupils have been free to choose topics and are encouraged to make self-assessments.

One of the strengths of the so-called 'process writing approach' (despite the awkwardness of this term) lies in its recognition of ownership, i.e., that each writer 'owns' her own writing and that it should only be changed, if at all, by the writer. This can come after consultation or negotiation with the teacher or other children, but does not come as a result of decree by the teacher.

A Research Study

How individuals' ownership of their own writing (and hence learning) is respected and encouraged by teachers of writing (in both primary and secondary schools) is one of the key themes of the *Responding Effectively to Pupils' Writing* study which was completed early in 1989.

This research project, co-ordinated by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research on behalf of the Department of Education, set out to examine how successful New Zealand teachers of writing respond to their pupils' writing at various stages of the writing process. We wanted to find out how pupils were encouraged to write, and to document some of the techniques or strategies used by effective teachers. We hope that the record will be of practical value for other teachers and eventually form part of the basis for in-service courses. The study illustrates the extent to which Donald Graves's approach has influenced New Zealand teachers, although the research project was not carried out with this intent. We also discovered many variations in teachers' handling of different stages of the writing process.

We began with an extensive consultative process, including detailed interviews, which were carefully transcribed, with over 60 teachers. In the second half of 1988 five teachers were chosen for observation from five different levels, 25 in all: J3/Standard 1 (Year 2), Standard 4 (Year 5), Form 2 (Year 7), Form 4 (Year 9) and Form 6 (Year 11). Most of the teachers were women and taught in large urban areas such as Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin but a few teachers in small town or rural areas were included. We also wanted to be sure that the pupils in these classes were reasonably representative of the different ethnic groups which live in New Zealand, so most of the classes, including those in Dunedin, had a high proportion of Maori and Pacific Island pupils as well as children from European or Asian backgrounds. Each teacher was observed for several hours in their own classroom, and detailed notes made of the techniques used by the teachers when responding to the various writing activities.

A comprehensive research report, called, naturally enough, *Responding Effectively to Pupils' Writing*, describes the teaching of writing at each of the five levels, focussing upon these aspects:

(a) the teachers' views of, or approaches towards, writing (e.g., how each teacher interpreted the writing process);
(b) classroom management (e.g., layout of the room and kinds of groupings used);
(c) how teachers responded to different stages of the writing process (e.g., drafting, modelling, proofreading, conferencing, sharing, publishing);
(d) the kinds of evaluation and feedback employed (e.g., oral and written feedback and use of marks/grades or descriptive comments); and
(e) the assistance provided (e.g., in relation to spelling, punctuation, voice and ownership).

Also, overviews, summarising the teaching of writing across the three primary levels and across the two secondary levels, are included.

How, then, did the teachers encourage pupils to develop their own writing? How was the writing kept consistent with individual experiences, perceptions and preferences? How were the pupils encouraged to become authors in their own right, and to maintain ownership of their writing? At least nine practices can be identified which assisted in this process.

1 *Pupils were encouraged to express their individuality*

Each teacher was aware of the need to preserve the individual voice of the pupils. They saw writing as the principal means by which personal ideas and experiences could be conveyed and that these should be written down in the pupils' own style. All teachers acknowledged and respected the point of view of each child in their class, irrespective of cultural background, and pupils were encouraged to develop confidence in expressing their own voice in culturally appropriate ways. What the pupils themselves wrote was highly regarded, and not given secondary status within the classroom; so, for example, the writing of other pupils was often a source of reading material, the children read each others' writing, and not just extracts from published, professional authors. All teachers agreed that it was essential to come to know each pupil as a unique human being; each person has his or her own rate of development, as much in writing as in any other aspect of language acquisition; we each have our own preferences. The 'process' approach to teaching writing emphasises the various stages and activities involved and was thus regarded as particularly helpful in meeting these requirements. All the teachers assured the children the right to write without fear of intrusion or interference.

These beliefs were not confined to the primary teachers. At the fourth form level (14-year-olds) for example, one of the main concerns of all the teachers was to enable the students' personal voice to emerge through their writing. They said that it was very important to empower students by giving them the necessary skills and opportunities to communicate their ideas, feelings, attitudes and reactions. For this to happen, students need to feel trusted and to trust, to feel secure and unthreatened in the expression and sharing of themselves through their writing. Consequently, writing instruction was personal in orientation, reflecting the needs of the individual pupil.

2 *Original or personal ideas were drafted first*

Drafting, or getting ideas and experiences down on paper, was regarded as the foundation of writing, the creation of the raw material from which a satisfactory piece of publishable writing could be forged. In all classes the teacher assisted by providing a supportive environment. They wanted to allow drafts to be produced in a way with which pupils felt at ease so that they contained their own ideas or, if the ideas of others, were expressed in their own style. Many teachers, therefore, regarded a period of 'sustained silent writing' as an essential part of the process. During this time they avoided interacting with their pupils or, for those requiring urgent assistance, kept it to a minimum. Often, this private writing time would last from 10 to 20 minutes, and was seen as giving pupils a space for withdrawing inside their own minds to get in touch with their own imagination, thoughts and emotions. In other classes, including those with a high proportion of Maori and Pacific Island students, total silence was not regarded as culturally appropriate and pupils were able to share ideas with each other as they composed their drafts.

In order not to impede the flow of ideas, particularly with younger writers many of whom might well have struggled to produce even a single line of text, risk-taking practices were encouraged: pupils, for example, often attempted the spelling of words they were unsure of. Checking up in a dictionary or thesaurus could be done later once sufficient ideas had been put down on the page. This practice was observed frequently at the secondary level, too. Drafting time was also seen as an opportunity for pupils to rearrange their ideas in different ways, with no penalty attached to crossings out or a tangle of lines indicating changes of order, or insertions of new words or phrases. Of course, pupils differed widely in their revising practices with many making comparatively few if any changes to an initial draft, but the scope was there for pupils to put their initial thoughts down in a relatively unrestrained fashion.

3 *Choice of topics was often left up to the pupils*

Writing was seen as coming from within the pupil, though influenced and often changed by discussion or through reading what others had written. So ideally the ultimate choice of topic and the selection of ideas belonged to the pupil. However, it was apparent from this study that the further through the school system pupils moved, the fewer

opportunities were available for choosing writing topics. In no class were pupils free to choose their own topics at all times; in fact, many teachers said that total freedom limits pupils' writing development, especially if pupils write the same kind of material ad nauseam and fail to experiment with other types. Also, every class had some pupils who had difficulties in generating their own ideas. The teachers were always happy to provide assistance if it was required.

Most of the junior and middle school teachers allowed a lot of topics to be chosen freely, and in some classes pupils almost always chose their own topics, usually drawing from their own experiences or classroom activities. But by intermediate level 11- and 12-year-olds were required most often to write on topics chosen by the teacher. In the secondary school pupils were rarely allowed to choose their own topics. In one fourth form (Year 9) class, however, pupils were encouraged to make a list of their own ideas and chose their own topics for creative or personal writing. This teacher alternated pupil-chosen with teacher-set writing. In secondary school when the writing was on literary topics, though the subject was set by the teacher, there was often choice among a range of options, and the pupils frequently had the opportunity to handle topics in their own way. The principle of ownership, therefore, was not lost sight of and, in at least one other class, pupils could negotiate with the teacher and write on a personally chosen topic even when the teacher had assigned a topic for the others.

4 *Modelling was only used when judged appropriate*

In theory, although modelling of various kinds was regarded as a useful technique to employ in order to show pupils how to go about writing (especially at the drafting and proofreading or editing stages), in practice most of the teachers preferred not to model the act of writing in front of their pupils. Junior and middle school teachers did occasionally write their own stories alongside the pupils, and read them out, but this was not a common practice. Models in the form of extracts from published writers, however, were often used.

The teachers were concerned that modelling would influence the students' own practices, and that it might lead to a loss of personal voice and individuality. Some teachers, for example, felt that pupils would imitate the teachers' models, thinking that how the teacher went about the act of writing must be how everyone should write. They might even take up the teacher's topics and ideas. Others thought that individual creativity would be stifled because of an unwillingness by students to take risks, worried that their work would not be up to the same standard as the teacher's.

Pupils' ownership of their writing was considered more likely to be preserved, therefore, if demonstrations of the various stages involved in writing and the guidance offered were less direct. Direct help should be designed in response to individual needs. Most of the teachers were very reluctant to increase feelings of incompetence or lower confidence among their pupils, and hence preferred to avoid situations where examples of their own writing practices, however unintentionally, could take precedence over their pupils' own development as writers. However, it was interesting to observe considerable variation among teachers in their use of modelling. Whether teacher demonstrations of the act of writing were actually beneficial to some pupils and harmful to others remains an unresolved issue.

5 *Conferencing was integral to pupils' development as writers*

Various kinds of conferencing took place in the classrooms. These ranged from brief dialogues with pupils, in response to individual needs, while the teacher was moving about the classroom (roving conferences) to more formal, often timetabled, one-to-one conferences after pupils had already prepared a draft and discussed it with other pupils (individual conferences). All types of conference were regularly used in secondary as well as primary classrooms, with the occasional exception.

Generally, in offering assistance, irrespective of the kind of conference involved, the teacher supplied suggestions which the pupil was then at liberty either to accept or to reject. However, these suggestions were most often in response to a pupil's comment or query; they were not just the teacher's view of what was appropriate. As a result, ownership of the writing remained with the pupil. In the classrooms we observed and these were the classrooms of successful teachers, no attempt was made by teachers to impose their ideas directly on the pupils or to change what the pupils had written without the pupils' approval. Of course, pupils frequently accepted the suggestions offered, but without feeling that their ownership was in any way compromised.

The one-to-one conferences were designed to facilitate a close working relationship with each pupil. Through them individual needs and each pupil's writing development could be monitored. In most cases, the initiative for having a conference remained with the pupil, and at certain levels such as intermediate and secondary the content of the conference was also the pupil's responsibility. These conferences, often occurring on a weekly basis, served as a secure framework within which ideas and language matters could be explored with the teacher by the pupil, without the pupil losing her personal identity or sense of control over the writing. In the primary classes, emphasis was placed on ownership and control of the writing by the pupil, so the thrust of the conferences tended to be positive, with questions and comments designed to allow pupils to describe what they were trying to do in their writing and to have time to respond to the teacher's remarks.

Similarly, in the secondary classes the student's voice and ownership of the writing was respected by each teacher and the responsibility for the final text was left with the student, even when a teacher, occasionally, made relatively exacting editorial changes. Generally, changes were suggested which preserved the message of the writing the way the pupil wanted to express it, while removing errors that could detract from that message being received by its intended audience. The conduct of conferences is an art in itself requiring careful questioning and a willingess to listen carefully; there could be a whole item in conferencing alone.

6 *Proofreading and editing were encouraged*

At all levels prior to an individual conference pupils were expected to have proofread their piece of writing very carefully, and, as far as possible, to have carried out this process by themselves. However, assistance from peers, in addition to self-checking, was an integral part of this activity in some classes. During the conference and afterwards when final editing changes were being made accurate language and clear organisation of content were expected particularly if the writing was to be published. The

final decision as to whether to publish or not was left to the individual pupil. Any editing changes suggested by the teacher were done with the conscious intention of preserving the writer's voice so that the ownership of the writing remained with the pupil; as with the previous stages of writing, any writing done was considered to be the pupil's property.

7 *Publication was left in the pupils' control*

Ultimately, the goal of writing was sharing it with a real audience; in most cases, this meant with the teacher and the rest of the class. At the primary levels, a vast variety of formats was used and pupils were encouraged to consider the presentation very carefully to match the purpose and the intended audience. Mobiles, wall displays, books (both little and large), posters, magazines, newspapers, cards, and computer printouts were all used at various times and displayed in the classroom.

Generally, apart from the youngest, the pupils themselves took responsibility for the publication of their own writing and could choose a format which, in their view, best matched the intent of the piece. Pupils themselves were able to choose which pieces to publish and when to publish; by no means all the writing done was published, although if a pupil was extremely reluctant to publish *anything* some additional encouragement was offered. At the secondary level, publication was considered important by all the teachers. Again, this was only if the student approved. Publication was seen as a source of motivation and as a reinforcement of ownership.

8 *Sharing with an audience was encouraged, but optional*

While publication was regarded as one of the principal means of sharing writing, both within the classroom and beyond it, sharing was done at all stages of the writing process from the initial discussion of ideas right through to reading out a finished piece to the whole class. Throughout the primary classes, various kinds of sharing occurred, with the aim of gaining feedback for the writer. While engaged in drafting or preparing for publication, pupils often exchanged comments and writing with each other, and in daily sharing sessions, those who wished could read aloud their stories or parts of stories, whether in draft or published form, to the rest of the class. Pupils were not compelled to read out their writing or to share ideas with others; ownership was protected in this respect, too. At the secondary level, the sharing of writing at all stages of the process was also regarded as essential and an integral part of the act of writing. If they wanted to, secondary students shared their writing; this occurred in most classes at the fourth form level, although at the sixth form level (Year 11) sharing was more often of an informal and private nature.

9 *Feedback and assistance were individually targeted*

Perhaps the most important way of ensuring that pupils retained ownership of their own writing (at both the primary and secondary levels) was in the kinds of feedback and assistance offered by teachers. To begin with, any assistance offered (apart from individual conference time, which was relatively structured) was couched in positive, affirming terms, and in response to a pupil's request. Apart from pupils who were floundering and uncertain about what to do at all, most requests for help were in relation to an aspect of their writing which the pupils perceived themselves to be unable to resolve. The assistance offered was generally non-intrusive, carefully tailored to the needs of the individual and offered without encroaching upon pupils' voice or ownership. Even when written comments were made in response to published writing, as part of a more formal evaluation of pupils' work, these were often made in a way which preserved the sanctity of the writing, either by being lightly made in pencil, or on an entirely separate piece of paper from the actual published piece. Such remarks, too, were generally appreciative rather than critical.

The teachers were facilitative rather than interventionist. They extended this attitude to the treatment of more formal aspects of language use, such as spelling, punctuation and grammar. In the primary classes, 'attempted' or 'invented' or 'approximated' spelling was encouraged at the draft stage, but accurate spelling was expected in published pieces; this was supplied if necessary by the teacher. Individual needs were taken into account over both punctuation and grammar; all the teachers believed that an over-insistence on correctness could destroy the pupil's cultural voice and that drawing attention to it required great sensitivity. In the secondary classes, spelling, punctuation and grammar were not 'taught' but treated in context – as points came up in an individual's writing. In this way the assistance offered was specifically targeted towards the particular difficulties experienced by the pupil.

Conclusion

The classroom practices reinforced the view that all writing belongs to the pupil as author. This applied to the free choice of topics (especially at the lower levels of the primary school), to the choice of ideas conveyed, to the choosing of the focus for the individual conference, to electing to share with the rest of the class or not at all, to deciding whether to publish or not and in what format. Generally, the assistance offered was conveyed in such a way that pupils were not forced to change what they had written, but rather were invited to consider other possibilities and to accept or discard them as they wished. The teachers whose teaching of writing we studied were chosen because they had been so successful. They used the strategies detailed here and these were observed in all the primary and secondary classrooms participating.

Notes

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The reference to Donald Graves' book in full is:
Graves, Donald, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1983.

The Paris Review Writers at Work Series is available from Penguin Books. There are now several volumes in this series and as accounts of how writers go about the act of writing make for fascinating reading.

Differences from level to level in strategies and success are detailed in *Responding Effectively to Pupils' Writing*.

Responding Effectively to Pupils' Writing is available from:
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THE BEST OF SET Writing

UNLOCKING THE GREAT SECRET

WRITING REVEALS THINKING

By **Graeme Withers**
ACER

Nicola Chadderton

HERE'S a common or garden situation found in every class. The children sit down to work through a set of exercises. It may be Maths, or it may be something else. The children may be 8-years-old, or 15. They do the work. It may be a test or a group activity.

The yield is always the same – a set of papers for the teacher to mark.

Say it was Maths, in Year 3 (Std. 2): ten examples of simple number work. Here we have a clever and resourceful teacher (with a lot of spare time). She analyses the papers, and discovers that Alison, who got five out of ten, was correct on a different five questions from Neil, who also scored five. With even more time she can discover exactly what it is that distinguished Alison's set from Neil's – what thought processes or reasoning abilities were called into play in each case; what was going wrong, what concepts are needed by each child, but not yet grasped.

Why not set up a situation where the students actually tell us answers to these larger, more fundamental, questions? Along the way we might make some surprising discoveries. Alison got five out of ten; so did another girl,

Kylie, and she got the same five right. However they went about the problems in different ways. Is there any way of unlocking the secret of these individual differences, and building up a clearer picture of the abilities of the two girls? Yes: get them to write about how they thought.

Process writing across the curriculum

Over the past twelve months, I have been working with a group of Australian teachers in the mid-primary school, and with children of about the age of eight. The study which initiated this work is aimed at reviewing classroom practice in teaching and assessing literacy across the country. It involved getting the teachers to comment on their teaching philosophies, classroom strategies and assessment criteria, and a large selection of these comments will eventually be published for other teachers to share.

One strategy which just about all these teachers (there were over 50 of them) used in their rooms was the approach to students' writing which focussed on it as a process. A rough summary of their strategy might be the following:

1 **Thinking**
2 **Talking**
3 **First draft**
4 **Personal Edit**
5 **Conference**
6 **Final form**
7 **Publish**

Most of them made it clear that they used this strategy in other contexts than just 'Language Arts' or 'English' They also made it clear that it was a particularly useful strategy to support work in what they called, generally, 'problem-solving'. They had discovered a way of teaching not mentioned in the textbooks or in College courses. And it worked.

Process writing and problem-solving

Here is an adaptation, by one of the teachers, of the basic process. She was using it for problem-solving across the whole curriculum in her room. A wall-display showed to her 8-year-olds the points in **bold** in the following table. Her comments on what actually went on are added in ordinary type.

1 Listen to the problem.
The teacher or a student tells or reads the problem to the class. Teacher and class discuss the problem, underlining important words, and discussing other words or phrases that students don't understand.

2 Look at the problem.
In pairs, the children read the problem silently or aloud to one another.

3 Discuss the problem.
The pairs discuss: 'What are we being asked to do? How will we work with the problem?

4 Decide about the problem.
'Shall we draw a picture? Make a list? Make a table? Work backwards? Look for a pattern?'

5 Try the problem.
Students try, individually, one or more strategies to solve the problem.

6 Talk to your partner (or, if you're both stuck, to the teacher) about what you did.
This is the stage called 'Conferencing'.

7 Check your answer.

8 Publish and share your answer.

Donald Graves invented the techniques of 'process writing' after studying how 'real' authors write, and trying techniques out in New Hampshire classrooms. Even the teachers who hadn't read his books often gave pupils at the 6th stage (conferencing) a *conference card*. It has a top flap saying:

You will need:
- a pad;
- a pencil;
- a dictionary.

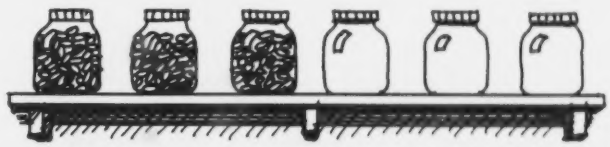
The main card reads:

Publishing Conference
1 Author reads the work and others watch and *listen*.
2 Check:
   - capitals;
   - full-stops;
   - commas;
   - inverted commas;
   - spelling;
3 Does it make sense?
4 How will the work be published?

This card was used during language work across the whole curriculum for Maths, Science, Social Studies, Health and so on, and not just when problem-solving was the main point of the activity. Children were very used to it, and cued in to the knowledge that special equipment (calculators and other instruments, for example) would also be needed during certain sessions, particularly Maths.

A simple example of process writing in Maths

In her Year 3 (Std. 2) class the teacher set up the following task: she issued each child with a Maths task sheet which depicted six jars on a shelf, three shaded (on the left) and three 'empty' (on the right). The printed stimulus for the task read:



Jelly Beans
Curly's boss had told him to set up the six jars as a display for the jelly bean promotion.
'How does it look?' asked Curly, about to leave for lunch.
'Well, I'd like it better if you alternated full and empty jars.'
Curly's in a hurry. What's the least number of jars he needs to move?

The children were asked to try to solve the problem of alternating the jars using some hands-on method (Unifix blocks were the most popular item resorted to, initially at least), and to record the results of this transformation of the printed problem to 'real-life'. A process writing procedure was undertaken, following the strategy set out on the wall-chart.

Here is a selection from the final versions of their solutions to the problem, produced by this class of 8-year-olds, after this process in Mathematics. They are ready to publish for the rest of the class and to be discussed by the class:

1. First I tried to use the unifix blocks but that didn't work out. Then I tried drawing a picture, but that didn't work out either. Then Catherine and I worked together using cups and marbles, the full ones had marbles the empty ones didn't. We took about 4 goes

to get it, and then we got it, well, Catherine did I should say. All we had to do was to move the marble from the second jar into the fifth jar. It was so easy, and the least number of cups we had to move was 1.

2. The answer was 1. At first I used unifix but I wasn't getting anywhere so Mrs Hockley said I could work with Jacki. Then Jacki and I got some mugs and very soon we found the answer. We poured the second into the fifth jar.
3. First I tried to work out the maths problem with unifix. But that didn't work because, I couldn't do what I wanted to do. Then I experimented on paper. But I still didn't get it. So on paper I drew six jars. I had 3 full jars at the start, and 3 empty ones at the end. I got the second full one and picked it up and tipped it into the second empty jar and there was my answer. It was 1 jar.
4. To fix a problem you need six cup and three marbles and you get the second morbel and put it in the fifth cup.
5. First I tried the unifix blocks. They did not work and then the paper did not work but then [I used] the caps I pot the second cup into the fifth cup.

These versions are what the children prepared for publication, and handed in for their teacher to review. Student number 3 also handed in his FIRST DRAFT, which showed her just how far he had come in organising and controlling his language during the conference process.

First Draft
first I treid to work it out with unfix but that didn't work because I couldnt do what I whanted to do. Then I experamented on paper but I still didn't cet it so on papper I drew some Jars and had 3 full jars at the start and 3 empety ones the I got the second full one and tiped it into the second empty and there was my arswer.

Published Version
[Above, Student No. 3]

*W*riting about thinking

Here is another example from Maths. You may skip this one if you don't teach Maths and go straight on to the last sections, *Across the curriculum*... and *Some implications*... But this example is a good illustration of the last implication of all – students can unlock for you the great secret, why they went wrong, for you to give them the teaching that will put them straight.

This time the material comes from a Year 6 class who were asked to do some writing about thinking. Once again the subject area is Mathematics, and the task a simple one, chosen by the teacher because she was curious about the differences she observed between students' abilities in the matter of number series. Here is the task:

Complete the following number series:

43 34 54 .... 65 76

And here is the solution:

43 34 54 **45** 65 **56** 76

The students used the process writing approach in preparing the descriptions of how they went about the task but they carried it out of their own, making notes as they went. Student number 1 derived the correct answer, and this is how she went about it:

> What you have to do is to look at the first few numbers, and see what's going on. So I took 34 away from 43, and got 9. Then I took 34 away from 54 and got 20. So I sort of used that in the next bit. I took 9 from 54 and got 45, and then I added 20, and got 65 which was already there so I knew I was right. Then I took 9 away from 65, and got 56, and sort of checked it by adding 20, and there was 76, so I had to be right.

Student number 2, however, produced no answer, and offered the following piece of writing:

> I couldn't do it – I don't know what you have to do.

These two represented the extremes of the work the teacher received. Between them emerged a number of other insights into student ability. Student number 3 gave the wrong answer, and, in describing how he went about it, provided the key to what the teacher had to do next to improve his understanding of number series and his ability to solve such problems.

Number 3's answer was 43, 34, 54, **63**, 65, **67**, 76. His writing told her that:

> I looked for a number between 54 and 65, then I looked for a number between 65 and 76.

She took the issue further:

> Teacher: Why did you choose 67?
> Student: Because it's like 76, isn't it?

A sketchy understanding of how certain number series might work was mistakenly applied to this example – sometimes they do run in increasing order of size, but not in this case, as the appearance of 34 after 43 might have told the student. His selection of 67 'because it is like 76' was an interesting guess, in view of one other student's solution (discussed below), but no more than a guess.

Number 4 also derived the correct answer, but his description of how he got it happened to be faulty:

> I had to find the formula. And the formula was +9 and take away 20. So I just went on adding +9 and −20 until all the spaces were full. And I got 45 and 56 for my answers.

Despite the fact that, in writing the 'formula' it was reversed from −9, +20, there is no doubt that the student could and did solve the number series in a fairly classic way.

Student number 5 took short-cuts in both solution and description: he wrote merely:

> I took away 9.

There is obviously room for the teacher to point out subsequently that this approach to the problem will not always work, though it did clearly in this case. [65−9=56, 54−9=45]

However, for the teacher, the most interesting answer and description came from student number 6. She entered the correct numbers in the spaces, and also had 67 written on the end of the given series. Her comment read:

> I really guessed because I can't do these things ever. Because 34 is 43 backwards I thought the first space might be 54 backwards, which is 45. Then the next space would be 65 backwards, and the last one 76 backwards, which is 67. I hope I'm right.

This completely visual approach to the problem was, in fact, one that had not occurred to the teacher as a possibility, and revealed that more ways of thinking than a computational one might be used to assist the solution. Again it pointed out a weakness in the particular student's understanding of number series ('I really guessed...'), but not one that would have emerged from a simple ticking or crossing of answers right or wrong. By that measure, student number 6 was as 'right' as numbers 1, 4 and 5, and various other students in the class.

When the resulting solutions were displayed ('published ') on the classroom wall, students were challenged to read the other explanations, and add to the list if they found another way of expressing a solution, which several did. The teacher capitalised on number 6's visual solution

to offer other kinds of series in later exercises – everyone learnt, teacher included, from this whole sharing process. A rich process, indeed, when it can expose not only the accuracy, but also the diversity, of individual students' problem-solving processes.

Across the curriculum and across the grades

The process is generalisable, according to the teacher, beyond Year 3 and indeed beyond the primary school. Here, for example, is an expanded version of the process which might be used by teachers in secondary classrooms in setting up the strategy for their students. The words in brackets are interchangeable with the word in italics to indiciate how the basic scheme might fit other tasks in other classes.

1 **Thinking**
Consider the best methods of tackling the *problem* (essay topic/project/comprehension question). Get the criteria for assessment from your teacher in advance.

2 **Talking**
Share your ideas with a partner. Discuss a variety of different ways of meeting the criteria.

3 **First draft**
Set out your ideas on paper in point form. Experiment with different plans or ways of approach.
Try a rough draft. Don't worry about mistakes, but naturally you should try to be as accurate as you can.

4 **Personal edit**
Use a *calculator* (dictionary/instrument/work of reference) to check your draft. If you find an error, retrace your steps and find its source.

5 **Conference**
With a partner, check one another's *solution*(essay/project/answer). Incorporate the suggestions for improvement on your draft. Consult with the teacher if he/she is available.

6 **Final form**
Prepare a final version of your work. If your partner is available, use him/her to give it a final check.

7 **Publish**
Share your work with others in the class. And share theirs – they will have taken other paths which might be useful to you in the future.

Some implications underlying process writing

1 **Every teacher is a teacher of language**
You know the rules of *your* game, as far as language requirements are concerned – the English teachers know the rules of theirs. Only *you* can impart the rules of *your* game – but the English teaching profession can help with the rules (and the structures) of theirs.

2 **Language needs support**
It needs lots of dictionaries, thesauruses, specialised usage books. It needs dictionaries of different kinds, and at different levels (especially the ESL kids). And it needs spellers. And it needs them to be always available. Process writing in other disciplines sometimes needs specialist equipment to allow students to check their work. The word processor and spelling program is a huge boost to drafting, correcting, and publishing.

3 **Process writing does not mean more correction by you**
It does mean more correction, but by the students. It should mean less correction by you. If you find yourself doing more, then you're not doing it correctly. Initially, it might mean more in-class assessment, 'on the run' as it were, but you should find that even the need for this decreases as students become more familiar with, and more involved in, the process.

4 **Process writing does not mean more preparation by you**
By having the students participate in 'brainstorming' sessions about the possible outcomes for the work, which can be recorded and shared, you save yourself time – for thinking about the curriculum implications of the work rather than the details.

5 **Good writing partnerships are crucial**
Some will work best in pairs. Two arrangements are possible – students of equal ability, or one advanced and one less advanced. The former is probably preferable – otherwise advanced students miss out on getting the help that they need (and deserve), too. But you can judge best – you're the teacher. In some classes, students might work better in threes, or even fours.
Change the partnerships only when you see they need to be changed, when the pair or group are doing nothing. Students get used to each other's mistakes and are on the lookout for them.

6 **Self-reliance of the students is a key principle**
The more they participate in decision-making, the more they are committed to action (i.e., learning), and carrying out the whole task, rather than leaving it unfinished.

7 **Process writing takes class time**
'Will I get through the syllabus?' Yes; not everything has to be done using the process-writing approach. And you will save time if much of the students' drafting and personal editing is done at home.

8 **Language needs modelling by you**
You're the professional – you know the rules of the game, in the subject area being worked by the student. Sometimes these rules can be imparted by simple structures. But remember that occasionally you will have to show them how you would do it, quite directly.

9 **Students have to know the criteria for assessment before they begin**
A brainstorming session (five minutes) will collect as many criteria for the work in hand as you will need. Select from their suggestions, and remember – you don't have to assess everything all the time.

10 **The leading mode of assessment by you is diagnostic**
Students writing about how they went about a task will very often unlock, as the title of this article suggests 'the great secret' – just where they went wrong: what it was that they couldn't do: what concept they had failed to master.

Notes

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Dick Frizzell

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Staging Points in Personal Narrative

By Irene Farmer,
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and
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London

This booklet was first published by the Language Development Unit, Department of Professional Studies, Bretton Hall College, Wakefield, Yorkshire WF4 4LC.

Staging points: where did the idea come from?

During 1979-80 we were invited to work in three middle schools (with 8- to 13-year-olds) to clarify what counts as progress in writing. We decided to select, with the teachers, three or four children from each year group. Each child was chosen as a typical representative of a fairly large group of writers in the class having their characteristic achievements, their problems and their interests. We planned to follow these children as they moved through the calendar year and, in some cases, through the school.

The natural starting point seemed to be personal stories. As we studied the stories in seminars with the teachers and other colleagues we began to realise that certain features in them appeared again and again. What's more, the stories from different years and from different schools seemed to have a remarkable number of features in common. Taken together these features suggested the points the children had reached in their development as writers. So we began to think we might be able to describe the basis on which the teachers had made their original intuitive selections.

We needed — and wanted — to *avoid* prejudging the issue by assuming from the start that there was *one* developmental sequence, with fixed *levels* at intervals along it. Instead, we hit on the notion of something more flexible, a STAGING POINT that a child might be moving towards, or through, or beyond. This left open the question whether there was one mainstream route, or several routes in parallel, and whether they all led in exactly the same direction.

What kinds of features?

To begin with we selected a case study story from a session that had gone well and invited the team:

1. To read the story *aloud* first, making the most of its potential meaning.
2. To voice any intuitions they felt about what was being *achieved,* and any questions or suspicions about things that might be *constraining* the writer.
3. To go through the piece slowly, sentence by sentence, or clause by clause, looking for *evidence* to support, modify or extend their intuitive perceptions. At the same time, we suggested, they should be looking for any evidence that might counter their initial ideas.

While we can't follow exactly this procedure in a booklet, what we'd like to do next is to invite you to join in.

Staging point one

Here is one of the stories that started us off. It was dictated to the teacher, and then copied out by Tony from her handwriting. Perhaps you would like to begin by reading the story aloud, mentally noting the features that spring to your mind, so that you can compare these with the ideas offered by other teachers.

My dog

My dog's name is pip. My dog went to a car. wen ethe car was going to the road. His Foodt is Broken ~~Fyom~~ by the car and the car as not Stop. wen He as run the dog over. I star ta criy wen and ~~yo~~I sooter my dog and whe was bleeding on is Foot. And he drit in the car.

Tony

Looking at the story as a whole — and knowing Tony — the team agreed that it was quite an achievement for him to recall the events in what seems to be their real order. The story rang true: he was trying to give a direct, honest account. Another achievement, for him, was the suggestion of feelings, however implicitly. The sentences were well formed, and he had remembered to copy the stops. Interestingly, most of them were separate sentences, rather than a chain linked by 'and' or 'then': had he picked that up from his basic readers? On the other hand he seemed to be shifting from present to past and back, without realising it.

Right, suppose we go through line by line to check these notions? 'My dog's name is Pip': even now the dog is *present,* though he died some time ago. In Tony's imagination these events are still alive. For most story-tellers this would be a positive help, but in Tony's case it leads to a problem. If his imagination catches the past images as if they were happening as he talks, he might feel the present tense was natural. So his story would be a kind of running commentary. But to help his reader, he would have to stay in the present (or past) until there was an emotional reason for changing.

Here he moves from 'is' to 'went', back to 'is (broken)', and on to 'saw'. It seems as though, as he plans each sentence, he hasn't an established sense that he is telling a story in the past *or* in the present. That might help to explain the puzzling use of 'I start to cry' and even 'he dead in the car'.

'My dog went to a car when the car was going on to the road.' This is a complex sentence. But most of us would say something like 'a car *that* was going on to the road', or 'a car, *as it* was going'. While planning his complex sentence, Tony is struggling and still has to repeat 'the car' — as if to remind himself. It happens again in the next sentence. And when he does substitute for 'the car', something odd happens: 'the car has not stopped when *he* has run the dog over'. These slight jolts occur in the two complex sentences, and suggest the struggle he has in constructing them.

In fact, when we played a tape of Tony reading his story, the way he read immediately confirmed these two hunches about his planning problems. At this age he was still hesitating after every word or phrase. He wasn't fluent enough — even in his talking — to produce a complete sentence confidently and with clear articulation. (Thus, conceivably, he might have meant to say 'I start*ed* to cry', but it made no difference to the spoken sound.)

A final point. Tony does start by introducing his dog to us. And he does seem to be trying to say exactly what the car was doing as the dog 'went to' it. However, in the last sentence, what he says leaves us a little confused. Can this 'car' be the one already mentioned — that did not stop? Or is it another car, perhaps belonging to Tony's family? The reader can't be sure. And this kind of inability to take the reader's needs into account may be rather a significant feature.

It's important to note that, in spite of all these constraints, we sympathised with Tony's story and other children responded to it. Tony has every right to feel he is *communicating* as well as reliving an experience that is important to him. So his struggle has been worthwhile.

Among Tony's year group (of 9 year-olds) this story represented the most elementary staging point and there were possibly up to a dozen children approaching or passing through it. Let's start a check-list of achievements and constraints we might expect to find regularly in their writing.

We'll see later how analysing Tony's work in such detail helped us to form a policy for the whole group of 'Tonys'. Meanwhile, our next job was to study the group of writers rather more able than Tony and select a story that would demonstrate further achievements — possibly suggesting what might count as major progress for Tony and his group.

A FIRST STAGING POINT (example: Tony)

achievements

something important to tell
events in a clear sequence
an indication of feeling
the beginning of detail (and complex sentences)

constraints

needs help in getting it down
reads back haltingly, and thus
  can't scan back while writing
plans *one clause* at a time, and thus
  moves from past to present without intending to
  changes subject (from 'car' to 'he')
  repeats nouns in full ('a car . . . the car')
  uses elementary verbs — all to simplify planning
more for self than *audience* (whose is the final 'car'?)
naturally uses his local dialect (as/has, ta/to, is/his)
insecure on simple spelling patterns w(h)en, w(a)s, s(aw),
  t(o) cry, died

Staging point two

One of the stories we considered was Phillip's. Again you might like to read it aloud, bringing out its full value and helping your perceptions of what's being achieved to surface.

My noRty cat

> One day my Dad and me whent into The Loft to put sum FibRe-glass FoR inshlashan we had left The ladeRs up and the loft DooR open So when we wos puting the FibRe glass Doown the kat kame ip and toRe all the Fiber glass then it whent pounsing about then I whent afteR it and I fell thRoo the FlooR Bodes and landid on my bed my hed had manged on the wall and I had a big bRoos on my hed my Dad had to patch The Roof up becose it had an hole in it.
>
> Phillip

We all liked the opening and the detailed way Phillip had set the scene for the reader. We enjoyed 'pouncing' and wondered whether the story from that point should be read with a touch of humour. Mind you, Phillip sounds remarkably sanguine about falling through the floor boards — and we'd give a lot to know what his Dad said!

Let's check these ideas, looking at Phillip's story line by line. We have a very clear picture how this accident happened. Phillip explains why they were up in the loft and carefully notes for his audience that the ladders were left up and the loft door open. The setting for the incident is well established.

'Then it went pouncing about.' This really is an expressive verb to choose — and it's followed up by 'fell . . . landed . . . banged . . .'. Phillip is just beginning to dramatise the action. Admittedly, he doesn't quite follow the drama through; in other words he hasn't yet a sense of building through to a climax. Most of us would make more of how we felt after crashing through the ceiling! — and that will be a good hint later as to how we might help him.

What happens with 'and I had a big bruise on my head' is that the story loses its impact, as if this was an everyday event. We don't know how Phillip felt at

this point in the story — and we don't know how he feels about it now. This is rather a let-down for the reader.

Could it be that there are still some constraints impeding Phillip's freedom as a story-teller? One clue, perhaps, lies with his reading. Children like Phillip tend to read without much expression. As they read a sentence they show that they are aware of its pattern, but they are not yet able to see how changes of tone or dramatic intensity, sentence by sentence, create the dynamic effect of the story as a whole.

It's a very important constraint, and it's easy to recognise in listening to reading, but the inevitable consequence in the children's writing is often overlooked. Obviously this has strong implications for teaching strategies.

There is another — less certain — group of clues to a constraint that could be equally profound in its effects. Looking carefully at Phillip's written script we can see a number of problems that may be impeding the flow of his writing. First of all he is still sometimes using capitals instead of small letters, both initially and in the middle of words. Second, the shape of some of his letters in cursive, 'joined-up' writing suggests that he is not sure yet how to form them (one *up* becomes *ip*, for instance). And third, in analysing his spelling we find that he has not retained a consistent *visual* pattern for some simple words: thus *cat* becomes *kat*. In fact, his visual scanning and retention of standard English patterns seems to be a weakness overall.

(On the other hand, we must recognise as teachers that so far as the *sound* of the words goes, he is reasonably strong. *Throo* and *broos* result from a *clear* impression of the *sound*, and a sensible generalisation on the way the sound can be represented in English spelling (boo, soon). So there is a strength on this auditory side that we can harness.)

If uncertainty is impeding the flow, the sheer hard work this implies for the writer is likely to produce a regression towards the end, as it seems to do in Phillip's case. Indeed, many teachers have expressed surprise at the 'Then . . . then . . . and . . . and' structure, following as it does sentences that suggest much more complex control in the earlier part of the story. Take 'We *had* left the ladders up . . . so when we were putting . . . the cat came up' for example: it is quite a refinement. The use of 'had' turns the first clause into an explanation (aside) instead of another event in the chain. So his regression to 'then . . . and' may give us a measure of the effort being expended earlier.

Let's now try to list the further achievements that stories like Phillip's undoubtedly demonstrate, while acknowledging the constraints that remain.

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A SECOND STAGING POINT (example: Phillip)

further achievements

gets it down himself
sets out the context very clearly
begins to choose an expressive verb (pounces)
  dramatising a moment in the action
plans complex sentences successfully, and thus
  generally uses pronouns (we, it) to replace full words (my Dad and me, roof)
  keeps up a persistent stance, reporting the experience in the past
  competently includes explanations for the reader, beginning to build up a sense of audience
tries to apply known spelling patterns to new words (broos)

constraints

reads back without much expression, and thus
  misses build up to a climax, and shifts of tone
  reports rather than expresses feeling
still intermittent problems in sentence planning (put some fibre glass)
some problems with capital and small letters
  how to form the shape (ip) when to use (R, F, D)
difficulties with visual retention, and thus
  cat/kat, sum, wos, hed, becose, throo

Policy suggestions for staging points one and two

Having analysed two early staging points so painstakingly, we'll now pause to see what benefits can be reaped.

First, a proviso. Whatever point they have reached in their development as writers, all children need to feel that they have something important to tell, and that their thoughts and feelings will be responded to. Thus when we or they fail to find something worth telling, it's natural that the writing should show dullness, repetitiveness, carelessness, regression into earlier problems — all signs of a lack of involvement. Allowing for the fact that all writers have their off days, the answer to this central demand for teachers to help children find stories of value, and to respond adequately to them in human terms, lies in an overall writing policy. On the other hand, the notion of staging points, of characteristic achievements and constraints felt by writers *even* at their best, opens the way to something less general. It leads to a policy for groups of children, taking into account where they are at and recognising the sets of cues that suggest possibilities for progress.

After a vein of stories has been opened up, by whatever means, we suggest there are at least three phases where a teacher can helpfully intervene on behalf of Tonys or Phillips:

(i) as the stories are formulated (perhaps more than once),
(ii) when the work's available for response,
(iii) as plans are made for setting up further work.

Formulation and reformulation

At the first staging point, writers are dependent on oral story-telling. Often their pens cannot follow where their tongues would lead them. So the primary aim is to foster those oral stories: in the story-telling circle, in a smaller group, in pairs with a tape recorder, as well as one-to-one with the teacher (or any available adult). In each context, it's the sharing of interests, the joint excitement and empathy, the questions and other responses that promote development. Sometimes it is important to gather round a drawing, encouraging the child to tell — and *act out* — the story it represents. (And for 'drawing' read animal, bird, treasured object, model, painting . . . .) These are the first formulations that can help the later, dictated story to be something animated, and suggest one or two key things for the teacher to reawaken, if need be, as the story is written down.

The secondary aim at this staging point is to help children with the actual writing process. This means explicitly teaching letter shape, formation and spacing;

allowing the children to copy from clear handwritten versions (sometimes on alternate lines); and providing guide lines for correct letter height.

Around the *second* staging point, oral stories are still likely to be more animated and dramatic than written ones. So they still need fostering. What teachers are looking for are ways of bridging the gap — retaining in the written version the humour, liveliness, shock, horror and other relevations! However, as the stories are first formulated orally, there are new possibilities. With Tony we didn't dare ask very much; Phillip's, however, can benefit from excited (implicit) questions from a group — 'What did your Dad say? I bet he was angry? — You really fell right through? — I know what I'd have done . . .'

When it comes to writing their stories down, children at the second staging point need a very clear policy for gradually mastering written conventions. We believe in encouragement combined with explicit guidance. Thus, Phillip already gets most of the capital and small-letter contrasts right; now is the time to master Rr, Ff and Dd — *one at a time*, perhaps spending a week or more on each. Once he has done that he can begin on capitals for people's names and sentence beginnings. Similarly, we can praise him for getting some of the long vowel spellings right *and* for sensibly recognising the sound patterns in new words. Equally, there are still long vowel patterns to be mastered, one by one (thus, 'bodes'), as well as the exceptional spellings of words he will use every day (some, was, through).

As Phillip and the others at his stage draft their stories, our priority must be to respond to the feelings and events. So, in moving around, we can pause and read aloud a sentence with pleasure — and anticipation! And our first reading of the completed draft must capture the potential meaning, however flat the words on the page might make it, while offering every encouragement to elaborate.

It's only after children in this group have had a chance to *enjoy* their stories and — with luck — to volunteer an extension or two, as they recapture the excitement of the original experience, that we turn to the second aim of encouraging careful 'proof reading' for the specific targets for that week.

Responding to drafts and final versions

Perhaps it would be useful here to list the factors we need to bear in mind:

Reading Aloud	FIRST AIM: *expressive* reading in full by the teacher as feedback to children who are around these two staging points; it is also public recognition of the value of their work.

SECOND AIM: selective recording (of as many extracts as possible) drawing attention to writers who are beginning to express feeling or find a dramatic moment.

HOPE: that over three or four weeks you will find something to read from every child in these groups.

Immediate Audiences

WHAT these children need from their class is a sympathetic response — many positive remarks; sharing of similar experiences; invitations to tell more — which they can take up orally.

THE TEACHER has a chairman's role, not imposing judgements but calling for genuine responses — often as not, further stories that *implicitly* show the audience's interest in what the writer has said; but also sympathetic enquiries about feelings at the time, and — ocasionally — questions that help to sort out any confusions ('Was it your car he died in, Tony?').

Permanent Forms

TO MAKE their efforts worthwhile, as many as possible of these pieces need to be mounted, together with the drawings or paintings that accompany and often elaborate what the writer has to say; to foster pride in their achievements, sometimes these go into their own 'reading' book, sometimes into a specially made class booklet; in either case they may just be presented in a classroom or corridor display. If teachers can organise occasional typing of selected work, this is a further source of pride.

Further Readers

THERE IS a chain of further possible readers — other classes in the same year or younger; their other teachers, and on special occasions the head or deputy; parents — perhaps most usefully in parents' evenings when parents can be guided through the work to see their child's successive achievements; and, of course, every so often children can re-read their own work and share it again: these occasions call for time that has to be planned and set aside by the teacher.

Laying foundations for writing

The central aim is to help children capture the experience (real or imaginary) as vividly as possible. To do so they can act it out, make images of it, or talk about it — and often combine two or three of these before they write. As they are moving through the first two staging points, children need to select from things they have already made their own in action, in drawing or in talk, and find those they want to extend and *keep* in the new medium of writing.

Thus the structures we set up in movement, drama and role play can indirectly help them to realise which moments they might dwell on and elaborate — movements of falling and crashing, incidents that spark off anger or reproach, moments of caring for something (or someone) that's suffering or barely conscious. . . . In taking on each of these roles, and through watching each other, children learn to focus on such experiences imaginatively, helped especially by the teacher's running commentary. Then looking back they can be guided to verbalise what it felt like, what was observed, how they reacted and what was said.

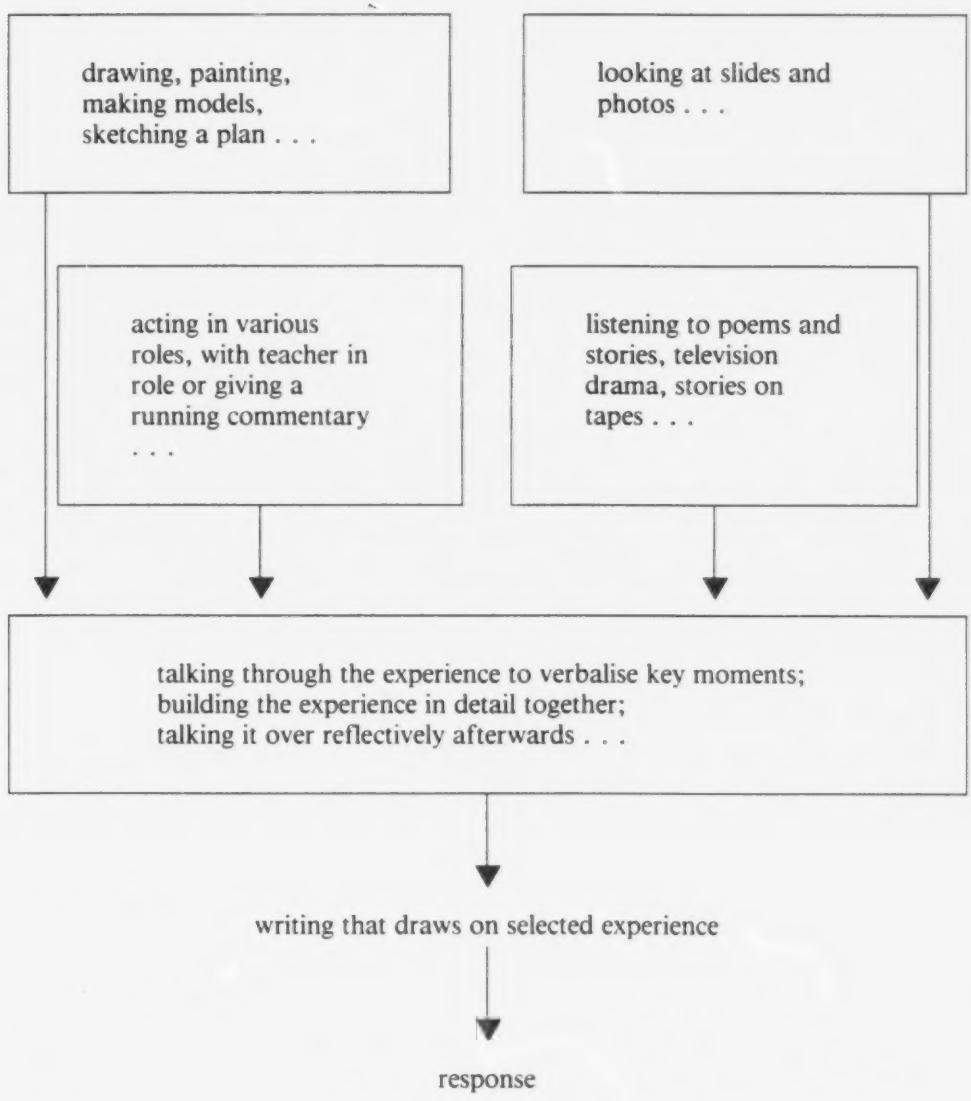
In reading stories and poems to them, the teacher is doing exactly the same thing — helping them to dwell in imaginary experiences. Many different kinds of imaginative work extend and bring out the full value of such contact with literature. There is specific value to Phillip and his group of reading aloud extracts that build up to a climax. So long as these are not presented as a literary model for him to try to imitate (which is beyond him, and would create a further crushing constraint), there's a strong hope that he (and others) might gain intuitive understanding of the way stories can be shaped. Obviously, for most children this is going to be a long, slow process: what's important is for the teacher to recognise the points where they may be breaking through.

Drawings (paintings, models or plans . . .) related to a story may well incorporate more detail — in the setting or the event — than the words do. So we need to give time for the drawing to be elaborated *and* to be talked through, rather than regard it as an optional frill. Equally, in the way they attend to a living creature, or a slide or photograph, teachers can help the children to observe with care, and in doing so to verbalise their impressions. Moreover, when the children want to go on to draw the rabbit's tail, or ears, or whiskers, there's a new reason for looking closely at the detail. Similarly with the slides taken during visits to boats, or farms, or power stations. . .

All of these are ways of building an experience imaginatively — whether it is real or financial. They all imply a policy which establishes a base for writing, in acting out, making images, reading and talk; it's from such a base that successful writing by children around staging points number one and two is most likely to arise.

Thus time is needed for all the imaginative *work* that leads towards — and interacts with — each piece of writing. A fortnight or more may be required to build the foundation for each set of stories. We have tried to sum up the teacher's choices in the diagram that follows.

Working towards good narrative


drawing, painting, making models, sketching a plan . . .
looking at slides and photos . . .
acting in various roles, with teacher in role or giving a running commentary . . .
listening to poems and stories, television drama, stories on tapes . . .
talking through the experience to verbalise key moments; building the experience in detail together; talking it over reflectively afterwards . . .
writing that draws on selected experience
response

Staging point three

In order to decide what further staging points might be useful, let's look at a more advanced story, following our earlier procedure. We suggest you read the story aloud; note any intuitions about achievement and (later) limitations; and go through sentence by sentence, sifting the evidence.

About my pet cat

One night I had just come in from playing out. I was in for a short time when somebody knocked at the door. I went to answer it and it was my babysitter and my babysitter's friend, and they said 'Has your Starsky gone out?' I said 'Yes'. Then she said 'There is a cat lying on the edge of the pavement and it is black and white and just the same as Starsky.' So in the morning when I was going to school I knew it must be Starsky because he didn't come in that night. Then I went down and knelt beside him and it was him, I could tell, and I started to cry and then my Mum said 'Don't get yourself upset. There's nothing we can do now.' Then at school I couldn't do my work because I was so upset about it and then when I came home from school he wasn't there. So when I got in my Mum said 'Why have you got tears in your eyes?' and I said 'Because he has gone.' She said, 'I know. I rang the R.S.P.C.A. to come and take him away.' And from that day I never forget him.

Louise

When we've read this story with teachers immediately after looking at Phillip's, one of the first intuitive responses has been: 'She's really telling us a story now — she knows how to help us identify with what she's feeling.' It does seem to be a story about feelings, first of dread, then of loss. And this time the parent's responses (her actual spoken words) become quite important, because she is trying to help Louise to cope. We even begin to get an impression of her character.

This story is more complex in other ways too. It deals with a longer period of time, and with the passing of time. There may still be moments where you ask yourself why she didn't say more (how did she get to sleep that night? —

why didn't they go and check their fears at once?), but from the next morning she carries her readers with her through the day.

Let's check these ideas. Louise starts just as simply as Phillip, but there's a new structure in her story:

One night I had just . . .
So in the morning when I was going . . .
Then at school I couldn't . . .
So when I got in . . .
And from that day . . .

These phrases express more than the passing of time; they mark shifts in mood as the story progresses. And the final phrase stands back a little, reflecting for a moment on the whole experience. Like *all* writers, she tries to give shape and meaning to what she's been through, and the feeling that she's making it accessible to us may actually be a help to her own understanding.

The opening is as matter-of-fact as Phillip's: it sets the scene in the same competent way. But this time the ordinariness of the opening intensifies the shock of the baby-sitter's news. And in the morning Louise *dwells* on the moment of recognition: 'Then I went down and knelt beside him and it was him, I could tell. . .'

These are among the simplest clauses in her story, and their simplicity is appropriate. They are no more complex than Tony's — and like him, Louise 'started to cry'. But for her there is a *choice* of the structure to use. A sentence before, telling us about her premonitions, she wrote: 'So . . . when I was going . . . I knew . . . because he didn't . . .', a much more complex sentence. She is drawing on a much wider repertoire, so that when she keeps things very simple, there's a natural reason. 'I know.'

We notice that she is outrunning her technical know-how at this point. Introducing speech calls for a new range of punctuation marks. On the other hand when you have written as good a story as this there is a very strong basis for wanting to master the technical conventions that authors use. We might also be uneasy about the need for more full stops to mark the end of sentences. However, we must recognise that *spoken* stories planned with 'and' and 'then' are still the basis for Louise's sentence structures (rather than a literary model) and these are being used to good effect here. Since spoken language is inevitably more difficult to punctuate than literary forms, we would be wise to consider where it is really essential, in the *reader's* interests, to introduce a full stop.

Louise seems to be confidently embarked on her voyage of explanation as a story-teller and a writer. Where will she go from here? Will there be further staging points in her personal narratives? — What has she left to aim for? After study-

ing these questions for some time, we think there are three things at least to be said. First, there definitely are further achievements ahead, and we can describe these as natural staging points. Second, there may well be more than one route, and this may subtly modify what count as 'staging points': for instance, some switch to a literary model for their personal stories. Third, writers who move beyond Louise's staging point, telling more complex stories, may also return to simpler stories like hers. This should not normally be regarded as a regression: the significant achievement lies precisely in the *range* of their story-telling, whether in simpler or more complex modes.

A THIRD STAGING POINT (example: Louise)

further achievements

beginning to shape the story as a whole, and thus
  involving the reader
  indicating shifts in mood
  building to a climax
  rounding off reflectively (in the present: 'never forget')*
can build a story round subjective feelings,
  indicating inner events
using dialogue and creating reciprocity between characters, and
  thus both enables and assumes an expressive reading
just beginning to indicate other characters beyond self
within a spoken model has a choice
  of complexity or simplicity in sentence
  and *effect*
  of a more informal relation to reader (couldn't, didn't)

constraints

in punctuation
in specific spelling patterns

*One typist 'corrected' this to the past, and we wonder how often we've done so with pupils before this — missing the point of the shift to present time!

Staging point four

Looking at a story by Sarah, with teachers from her school, we felt it might represent a further staging point. Try for yourself, first of all, the usual process of reading through and so on.

A Smashing Accident

We, that is my mum, dad and myself, had made a little green house type of thing, with bricks at the edges and a piece of double glazing window lying on the top. We had planted some seeds and young seedlings in it.

One weekend, round about June, my dad, mum and two brothers, James and Matthew, decided to go on a trek down to our spot (as we called it). I did not want to go, as I am not too keen on walks. My dad asked me if I would water the little seedlings in 'our' little 'green-house'. I agreed, as I had nothing else to do.

The family (all except me) set off on their trek. I fetched the watering can and the hose to fix onto the end of it. I filled it half way with water and clambered down to the 'green-house'. When I reached the 'green-house', I placed the watering-can on the floor and lifted the glass (which was resting on the bricks and the garden wall). As I reached for the watering-can the glass slipped out of my hand and fell on the floor with a smash!

I felt worried and burst out in tears. I looked at the glass which sparkled in the sunshine. I ran across to the wall and sat on a little seat (as I called it) which was built into the wall.. I was very worried as I waited, I was worried because I was wondering how I would tell my dad, and what he would do now.

When my dad and company reached home, I told my dad what had happened, I could not stop crying as I told him. My dad forgave me because he said that it was his fault for asking me to do it.

Sarah

On this occasion let us take some of the central intuitions one at a time and examine the text for detailed evidence as we go along.

One of the first things that hit us was the title: it's a sign that she has recovered from an unhappy experience and can even joke about it. At the same time, we can still read into it a rueful feeling as she recalled the real experience of smashing the glass. In other words (as often happens in poetry) a pun can be a valuable indication of the ambiguity in her feelings, now *and* then. You stand back now and say it's 'smashing', but then it was *you* that was smashed quite as much as the glass.

In another writer this interpretation might seem rather speculative. However, in Sarah's story there are many other signs of playful awareness about language in use. She recognises bits of family parlance, for example, 'our spot (as we called it) . . . and a little seat (as I called it)'. Their family construction is 'a little green house type of thing' and, we gather what it's name is in the family from a very delicate use of inverted commas: 'our' little 'greenhouse'. So Sarah already realised how to indicate the significance of words for one audience (the reader) as against another (her family). It's a new consciousness of language.

The more we think about it, the more this new consciousness seems to be integrally associated with other key features. Thus there are several explanatory asides to the reader, including a concise explanatory description about the 'piece of double glazing window'. Sarah is aware of the reader's needs and able (and willing) to share her thoughts and fears. Indeed, she seems to recall her thoughts in detail — for example, the 'inner speech' in which she wondered how she would tell. (This is the kind of inner event Louise didn't quite get round to.)

Her awareness of the reader and the possibility of communicating more of her inner experience seem inevitably connected with her ability to control the shaping of the story as it develops, and to choose individual words or phrases with precision. Both in the macrocosm (the paragraph) and in the microcosm ('reached for', 'clambered') there is a sense of her confidently using language for her own purposes. Rather than continue to analyse in detail, let's at this point list the kinds of evidence we see for this new staging point.

In discussing with teachers various examples of writing round this staging point, we have repeatedly noted that the adoption of a 'literary' model is not necessarily all gain. There is a danger that the young writer will be deflected from imaginative work on the experience itself into an over-conscious use of language for effect. And experiments with new effects (like the bracketed aside!) may come to irritate the reader who wants to know more about particular thoughts and feelings. But in this instance, we feel that the experience was too important to be submerged by literary conventions, and that Sarah felt impelled to dwell on it.

A FOURTH STAGING POINT (example: Sarah)

further achievements

shaping the story in sections and episodes, and thus
- establishing a context in the past before the main events (. . . had planted)
- beginning to cope with branching in the story (The family . . . I . . .)
- focussing on a key event and her reactions in detail (central paragraphs)

communicating her personal world to the reader, and thus
- explicitly noting family ways of referring to things
- telling her thoughts, sensations, and fears for the future (as she cries)
- beginning to think about her thoughts (wondering how I would tell)

aware of a reader's needs
- in many explanatory asides
- in many 'explanations' of events,
- including concise explanatory description (a piece of double glazing window)

aware of language, reflexively, and playing with it
- repeats 'I was worried', intensifying and dwelling on feeling
- bracketed explanations and ' ', used to indicate family parlance
- invents punning title (with valuable ambiguity of feeling)

with new precision in choice of language, indicating
- jocular relief (my dad and co.)
- sense of immediacy (what he would do *now*)
- detailed action (reached for, clambered . . .)
- precise feeling (burst out in tears)

overall, adopts a literary rather than a spoken model (see uses of 'and', for example)

constraints

possible over-consciousness of effect, of literary models to follow, and thus
- of language rather than experience

Given that this was an important personal experience, it is really quite surprising that, throughout the passage, Sarah draws so consistently on her reading for the tacit model for her writing. It was only after careful checking that we realised that Sarah never used 'and' as Louise did, as a kind of simple bridge or punctuation mark between the main events.

Take the central paragraph, for example. 'The family . . . set off on their trek.' That's a simple sentence, left simple without Sarah feeling the need for any co-ordinating conjunction, like 'so', 'and' or 'then', to start it or to link it to her next action. The next sentence again is simple ('and' being used to co-ordinate the two objects she fetched, not two events). In each of the following three sentences 'and' *does* occur, but we note that it has a special use: 'I filled . . . and clambered'; 'I placed . . . and lifted'; 'The glass slipped . . . and fell'. In each of these three cases the 'and' saves her repeating the 'I'; as a result the sentences are slightly elliptical and a flow of actions is suggested, rather than six separate events. Indeed, since 'and' is *not* used at every opportunity, it does create a sense of flow when it *is* used.

This is just one example of a 'literary' tradition in contrast with Louise's oral tradition. For Louise it is important to weld the events into one co-ordinated whole, and thus she writes: 'So in the morning . . .'; 'Then at school . . '; 'So when I got in . . .' It is an equally valid form of expression, drawn from speech.

The oral tradition at staging point four

There is no doubt that for some children around staging point four, spoken rather than printed stories are their natural model. In contemporary culture, families and neighbourhoods that set a high value on oral story-telling offer a special resource to the teacher that is not always recognised — indeed, it is often neglected. This is a serious mistake. For children not yet hooked on books, the natural way ahead in stories based on their personal experience is to develop some of the richer possibilities in an oral tradition. Let us look briefly at an example, reading it aloud as usual.

My Little Sister

> A funny little girl, with glasses, that sucks her thumb and can and will go into bad sulks as you will see.
>
> As I remember, my mum had said that we could go down to the park if we got a move on, but as I and mum were ready to go, sis went into the bedroom for a doll. Well as always sis could not find her doll or the dolls things. So I went for a ball. Well it all ended up that Allison came out of the house, with no doll and crying. As we came down the crescent I started to make fun of her and torment.

Well as we came down the field she just stood there very mad at me for making fun of her. Mum and me carried on walking. Then sis started to scream and shout, so we stopped to let her catch us up, when she did I started to torment her again. Well this time I had done it, she just stood there. Well as mum told sis to come on, a man with a white dog went by, the little dog stopped, and because she was just standing there sulking, the little dog weed down her leg. I could not stop laughing, but Allison did not know what to do. That left sis crying and in a bigger sulk than before. Mum got a leaf and wiped her leg. Then the man said that he was very sorry.

Sis is not always like that. It's just that things happen like that. All the same some times she plays tricks on me. But, as mum says what would you do without a little sis with her glasses and sulks, her thumb which she always sucks. But, in spite of all this she can be a funny playful little girl.

Gillian

One of the most striking things here is the confident way in which Gillian establishes a direct relationship with her reader — 'as you will see'. She makes it clear that on this occasion her aim is to establish something more general through an anecdote. In fact the story is framed by the neat introductory sketch — a pretty negative affair — and the concluding reflections, which suggest that, with hindsight, Gillian may be realising the struggle it would cost her to be fair to her sister's character as a whole.

If there is any loss of confidence (and stylistic control) it is in the final paragraph; the signs of struggle there are very interesting:

Allison is '. . . not always like that.'
'All the same she sometimes . . .'
'But, as mum says, where would you be . . .'
'But, in spite of all this she can be . . .'

These concessions — or even tributes! — are not too easily acknowledged; the comparative awkwardness of the structures indicate that to us. In spite of her earlier fluency, it is clear that Gillian has conflicting feelings about 'sis' and it is hard to bring some order into them. For the moment, the best she can do

is to end — after a redoubled 'but' — by stating for the first time something entirely positive. What we have to remember is that to compose better prose, she has first to compose her own feelings.

In this light, we can look again at the confident fluency of the anecdote. The first source of Allison's frustration has been forgotten, but the writer skilfully acknowledges as much — 'as I remember' — and moves on into the main events. There is a very interesting interplay between her almost confidential relationship with the reader ('Well it all ended up . . .') and her implicit acknowledgement that she herself provoked the scene in the field. Is she perhaps angling for us to enjoy the comic burlesque side without noticing too much that there was someone else who should have felt sorry? We *do* enjoy it, surely, but there is that reservation.

It would be possible to point to many other significant features in this character sketch, but let us be content for the moment with its clear demonstration that, when it comes to entertaining readers and establishing a close relationship with them, the oral tradition is a valuable resource. And there may be many other ways children can draw on it as they move towards the fourth staging point, and beyond it.

Within this booklet this is as far as we wish to take stories based on personal experience. They will continue to develop in very important ways, especially during the adolescent years. But for most children aged 9-13 we hope to have indicated a general direction for progress in writing, while allowing for some diversity. The next question is, what policies can we adopt as teachers, to foster the development of writers like Louise, Sarah or Gillian?

Further policy suggestions for staging points three and four

'You're a writer now': that's the feeling we should be giving children around these two staging points. Their control over the written medium is such that they can focus strongly on the experience they want to communicate. At the same time, they are increasingly able to realise the range of choices opening up as they start a story.

Take Gillian's opening, for example: it gains directness and economy from the intuitive decision not to say 'My sister is . . .' but to go straight in with 'A funny little girl, with glasses . . .' Once they feel themselves writers, children can respond with interest as they look at a range of story openings. They can see the point of Sarah's paragraphing — and gain encouragement when we point out to them that they are already thinking in paragraphs too. They're beginning to be aware of how readers may be affected, and thus are more open to questions

and suggestions as the class respond to their first drafts. And whereas Louise was probably using words unselfconsciously, Sarah's growing awareness of their potential effect may help her to revise details of the wording — in order to convey the experience more exactly.

There has been a romantic insistence in recent years on the unconscious work of the imagination. We don't want to deny that many discoveries about ourselves and others are unpremeditated. At the same time, we suggest there can be an enthusiastic interest for children — as for all writers — in the use of the medium to express thoughts and feelings in new ways. Writers revise and elaborate; they are interested in the contribution of the part to the whole, whether it's within the sentence, or the paragraph or the whole work.

Nevertheless, we agree that the teacher needs some guiding purposes, and for that we go back to the question, why tell stories such as these children are writing? What would count as development? Gillian's example reminds us that, in autobiographical stories, it's a major achievement to represent other people fairly, to enter into *their* attitudes and feelings at the time, and to reconsider our own. Looking back over the events, as the story now allows us to do, we can encourage the writer (and others with her) to imagine themselves further into the situation. Equally, we can invite Gillian, and others, to continue reflecting on that confusing, irritating, and even exasperating relationship. Drama would obviously allow this to go on in a less exposed and more exploratory way.

Sarah's story is a reminder that even very accomplished writers of her age may not find it easy to give an account of inner events. It's a long time perhaps since she sat down on the little seat, with pictures of the family's return running through her mind. Again, those confusing, appalling moments are the ones we need to focus on, in fiction or improvised drama or poetry, perhaps.

In general, personal stories offer children the opportunity to re-live difficulties they have encountered, and sometimes to enjoy a confusion that's mixed with delight too. Their stories become more complex as they try for a more complex imaginative understanding of what went on.

This is not to deny or reject the value of play — of stories that entertain. Indeed, tall stories, thrillers and comic burlesque are a natural way of encouraging skill in building to a grand climax (and dropping off into bathos); sustained tension, as the plot projects new surprises; verbal play and skill. This is the place where deliberate effects, and contributions from the teacher, even, don't come amiss. (To redress the balance for the boys, we include in the appendix a story in comic vein that reaches, we feel, beyond staging point four.) As writers develop confidence, they enjoy conscious experiment and wit of this kind. And while the serious and the comic story may appear as two poles, Sarah's punning title (and some of the best of Dickens) is there to remind us that laughter and tears may

both enter into serious work. It is the teacher, though, who will have to help children find a balance between stories for effect and stories to explore human relationships.

Finally, a word about spelling and punctuation. Technical control of these features doesn't necessarily advance in step with development in story-telling. However, with these writers the teacher has great advantages. The better the story, the more it is worth keeping and getting others to read or listen to. Thus, there is a powerful incentive to proof-read and produce fair copies, duly corrected. At the same time, we have to realise that, however talented the writer appears, she/he may only be able to cope with one new spelling pattern or one new use of a punctuation mark on any one occasion. The essential thing, therefore, is to have a departmental strategy indicating the likely sequence for major patterns or marks, so that, as the need for them arises in the writer's work, the child can be set the target of mastering them one by one. The children themselves can keep a record of these targets.

Of course, more complex stories raise the need to master new features, such as paragraphing, organising a list, indicating asides to the reader, laying out conversation . . . . The more important of these will call for individual help as drafts are returned for children to make a fair copy.

Coda

We have written this booklet as a first step to help ourselves and colleagues we are working with in school to clarify what we should be looking for and what we should do as we teach children aged 9-13 to write personal stories. We have no doubt that further work — e.g., in drafting and redrafting — will open up new policy ideas and probably give us a better sense of the relationship between staging points. While this work will be continuing in Bradford, we would welcome contact with any like-minded schools or groups who want to exchange reports of work in progress.

Fred at the Zoo

Fred was very excited. His father had promised to take him to the zoo as a birthday treat. He could take two pals with him. He was going to take Boris because he was his pal and Claude because he could give them the latin names and they could pretend they were very intelligent. Fred zoomed round to Boris's house on his 'chopper'. 'Hey Boris come on'. Dad says I can take you to the zoo, thats the place what people go to, to see what animals are like in their natural summat or other, come on'. 'The word is habitat' says snooty Claude coming down the path. 'May I come?' 'Yer, course I were just gonna ask you'. 'I will just get permission from mumsie'. He stepped into his Rolls-Royce convertible and zoomed off. Three minutes later he was back. 'I have got permission from mumsie'. They got there. After twenty minutes of goggling at a python, eight minutes of watching an elephant and twenty-eight pence-worth of betting on which mouse would eat the most lettuce leaves in the next twelve point three-four seconds (Claude's watch does everything) they come to the lions. 'It is just a big cat' says Claude. In no time at all Fred is inside the cage stroking it. It lets out a great roar and bounds out of the cage. Then follows a great chase in which Claude loses one Rolls-Royce convertible through a panicky chauffeur, one private helicopter through the G.P.O's new telephone lines and fifty-eight point five pence through a taxi driver. Fred and Borace, quite oblivious to the danger are having a touch-your-toes contest in a dead-end alley. The lion, trapped by keepers bounces onto Fred's back, leaps over the wall, and is promptly sat on by the elephant. Fred is still saying that he did not collapse but was knocked out by a charging porter.

Simon

NZCER/ACER

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Item 12

EVALUATING WRITING

A

New GUIDE

TO THE

English Tongue:

In Five PARTS.

CONTAINING,

I. Words, both *common* and *proper*, from *one* to *ſix Syllables*: The ſeveral ſorts of *Monoſyllables* in the *common* Words being diſtinguiſhed by Tables, into Words of *two*, *three*, and *four* Letters, *&c.* with ſix ſhort Leſſons at the End of each Table, not exceeding the order of Syllables in the foregoing Tables. The ſeveral ſorts of *Poly ſyllables* alſo, being ranged in proper Tables, have their Syllables divided, and Directions placed at the Head of each Table for the *Accent*, to prevent *falſe Pronunciation*; together with the like Number of Leſſons on the foregoing Tables, placed at the End of each Table, as far as to Words of *four* Syllables, for the eaſier and more ſpeedy Way of teaching Children to Read.

II. A large and uſeful Table of Words, that are the ſame in *Sound*, but different in *Signification*; very neceſſary to prevent the Writing one word for another of the ſame *Sound*.

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IV. An uſeful Collection of *Sentences* in *Proſe* and *Verſe*, *Divine*, *Moral*, and *Hiſtorical*; together with a ſelect Number of *Fables*, adorn'd with proper Sculptures, for the better Improvement of the Young Beginner. And

V. *Forms* of *Prayer* for Children on ſeveral Occaſions.

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Evaluating Writing

By David Philips
NZCER

Introduction

Teachers need marking techniques. Plenty are available, but which are the best? That depends on what you want them for. If you want to assess

1 Normal coursework writing — what the children do every day — then there will be two jobs for the marking to do:
   (a) diagnose faults (so that we can give exercises to correct them)
   (b) ascertain progress (so we can see if our teaching is successful).

If you want to assess

2 A year's work — or even a term's — then we will be looking for a technique which will:
   (c) assess the child's progress compared with his or her earlier performance
   (d) possibly provide a comparison of performance against the rest of the class, or the rest of his or her age group.

Choose your assessment technique carefully — it must fit the task (one of the above four), the class level, and the pupil. 'In evaluating writing we are assessing much more than their grasp of a programme: we are evaluating the students themselves.'

Why is Writing Difficult to Assess?

Despite the excellent research of Janet Emig, Donald Graves and others, the writing process itself is still largely a mystery. We know that it is a very complex process requiring the mastery of a variety of interrelated skills. Apart from the essential inputs of reading and thinking, skills such as knowing how to organize material, awareness of the teacher's goal, understanding the purpose of the specific writing task, all play an important part in creating written material. It is not surprising therefore, to find that pupils vary considerably in their ability to write. While some pupils improve their writing with relative ease, others consistently find writing a difficult enterprise. It is important to remember, though, that writing skill *develops*. It is not a static ability which one either has or has not. Consequently the end-point reached will inevitably vary from one person to the next. Since writing skills are usually in a state of change, and fluency takes time to develop, it is essential that both diagnostic and end-of-the-year assessments be made with the intention of encouraging the burgeoning writer.

Writing has both 'deep' and 'surface' features. The 'deep' ones include the purpose of the writing, its content and structure. The 'surface' ones are the orthographic or transcriptional aspects of spelling, punctuation, capitalization and grammar. It is so easy for teachers to focus on the 'surface' features and so easy for the pupils to think they are the only important aspects that both teachers and pupils may lose sight of the basic purpose of the writing. Collins and Gentner have drawn attention to this phenomenon, and have labelled it 'downsliding'.

> One great difficulty for writers is maintaining *connective flow*. The relationships between ideas must be made clear. Yet in order to write about an idea, the idea must be expanded downward into paragraphs, sentences, words and letters. Sometimes writers — particularly children — become lost in the process of downward expansion and lose sight of the high-level relationships they originally wanted to express. *Downsliding* — the phenomenon of getting pulled into lower and more local levels of task processing — is a very common problem in writing and in other domains as well. If a teacher emphasizes accuracy in spelling and grammar it will reinforce the natural tendency toward downsliding. The overall result will be that children focus almost exclusively on lower-level task components when they write.

Of course, it is often very difficult to avoid emphasizing those features of pupils' writing which are most clearly in error. But it would be unfortunate indeed if the error-seeking red pen was not tempered with a sympathetic attempt to improve writing skills beyond the merely 'surface' characteristics. It is not an easy job to mark the 'deep' features. But they do have to be assessed if we are to be helpful.

1 Evaluating Performance During the Year

Assessing the Developing Writer

Writers differ in their learning rate and in their potential for improvement. However, there is little point in prejudging a pupil's likely achievement in writing and teaching to that expectation. Instead, try to pay close attention to overall development and focus on specific writing difficulties. 'Composing a piece in any mode is a complex linguistic, experimental, cognitive, affective and scribal act.' (Cooper, 'Measuring Growth in Writing', *English Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 3, March 1975, p. 112.) Ask yourself:

Surface problems

Has this pupil an adequately legible style of handwriting?
How extensive is the pupil's command of language? Is she or he having difficulty with spelling, subject-verb agreement, sentence structure? Has she or he had sufficient practice with this mode of writing?

Deep problems

Can this pupil stand back from present circumstances and order thoughts in an appropriate manner? Does he or she know how to compose written work? Is choice of content (within the piece) or organisation of the content giving problems?

Has the pupil had enough experience to write on this topic? Is the pupil sufficiently motivated to write on this topic? Is he or she having difficulties with parents, peers, etc., which might affect performance?

This preliminary look may reveal that the student has difficulties. If so, steps will have to be taken to provide appropriate assistance. The teacher using this technique interprets the pupil's writing as part of a complex series of interrelating factors, each an integral part of his writing ability. Further, the pupil's progress is gauged against several variables. A mark in the teacher's markbook which is a simple sum of the number of errors the pupil has made, is not nearly as useful.

Revision is an integral part of most writing. Therefore another important procedure to follow is to allow the student to revise and re-work part of the writing if necessary, and consult peers, and the teacher, on the content and form of the written work. (The research of Donald Graves in this area is especially instructive. Though it deals with pupils in their first few years at school the conclusions are universal.) This procedure allows pupils to view writing as a continuous process with several mutually supportive stages, rather than simply as a one-off type of exercise done merely for the teacher's benefit.

Assessing the student's work during the year will entail these activities, in this approximate order:

(1) Consider the surface and deep features on page 2. Carefully note the pupil's development or behaviour within each area.

(2) If the content of the pupil's writing seems unrelated to the topics given, check the questions you asked, and the instructions you gave, for ambiguity. Make sure that the tasks set are within the students' capabilities, yet challenging.

(3) Discuss the more immediate difficulties with the student; provide a willing ear; be supportive.

(4) Correct 'surface' errors but by focussing on only one or two specific examples each time until the student reaches an appropriate level of mastery in them, e.g., capital letters for a few days or weeks, then commas.

(5) Take remedial action where necessary over specific thorny problems (i.e., by giving extra instruction and help, for example, with persistent poor spelling).

(6) Keep a careful written record of the student's improvement in addition to the first 'diagnosis'; update it regularly (e.g., 3 or 4 times a term).

Although this strategy requires considerable care, it is designed to encourage the student in a positive fashion rather than to inhibit development. Comments on the pupils' writing, whether verbal or written, should be selective rather than comprehensive. This is so that the pupil can focus on separate aspects of performance and gradually bring about improvement in them.

Methods of Marking

If marks or grades have to be awarded to pupils' written work, bear in mind some of the findings from research on the marking of essays. Even though most of this research has been concerned with secondary or tertiary level students, it is a useful reminder of the fallibility of the most carefully prepared teacher!

It has been established, for example, that the same piece of written work will not always receive the same mark, even when marked by the same marker. The order in which several essays are assessed may affect the quality of the mark awarded; thus a series of good essays may build up the marker's expectations so that when a poor essay comes along it will obtain a much lower mark than if it had been preceded by a series of mediocre essays; the reverse also applies. If essays are marked over several days, by the last day of marking the assessments are likely to be much less consistent than they would have been earlier in the piece. However, this is unlikely to be a serious problem when marking occurs in a single session, and provided class papers are not always marked in the same order. If papers are marked in the same order (e.g., alphabetically or by designated groups), the biases introduced due to marking order are likely to be significant.

A more pressing problem for the classroom teacher is deciding which criteria ought to be applied to any given piece of writing. What features should be examined? How inadequate does a pupil's performance have to be before some kind of assistance becomes necessary?

(i) Revealing Criteria of Marking

Complete agreement on the most appropriate features to assess does not exist. Different markers give more or less weighting to different criteria. For example, two secondary school English teachers may each have a pupil who insists on using an ampersand (&) instead of writing 'and' in his essays. The first teacher may consider this abbreviated technique to be a major breach of convention, and mark the pupil more harshly as a result. The second teacher may well ignore the ampersands and when handing back the pupil's essay simply make a passing reference to it. Some markers are consistently bothered by spelling mistakes: the attitude seems to be that incorrect spelling has to be stamped out, so the red marks will fly onto the pupil's essay. Although these examples may appear to be relatively trivial, research has shown that the consistent breaking of the conventions of spelling and punctuation can lead to reduced marks since the number of errors (even though they might be minor ones) inhibits the marker and also directs his or her attention away from the quality of ideas or content of the writing. Many studies, for example, have shown that handwriting quality also has an influence on the marks awarded to essays so care is required to ensure that students with poorer handwriting, spelling and punctuation do not suffer in their marks as a result.

Another problem, and one pupils often bewail, is marking criteria being inconsistently applied. Naturally, teachers apply different criteria depending on the aims of a particular writing exercise. A piece of creative writing such as a short story is likely to be examined for its quality of ideas, since any writing inaccuracies can always be tidied up. After all, published writers have the service of editors and secretaries. On the other hand, a piece of descriptive writing (e.g., an account of a holiday, or the construction of a familiar object) is more likely to be assessed on the basis of the accuracy of the

events recounted or the orderly discussion of the steps involved in the activity concerned. At the secondary level, essays may well be examined for their structural features: how well ideas hang together, whether the topic is appropriately introduced and covered to an adequate extent, etc. For all these types of exercise, the presentation (legibility, appropriate location of headings and margins, etc.) and the orthographic features (spelling, punctuation, grammatical accuracy) while part of the 'total communication', are *not* the most significant elements in the overall pattern of writing development. In any assessment scheme, therefore, they should not assume undue importance.

To sum up, the first step is to clarify the *purpose* of the piece of writing which is to be assessed. Some common purposes (following Stibbs) are: the recording of information for the writer's own use; recording information for someone else's use; helping the writer to sort out his own experience and thoughts; helping the writer to understand the experiences of others; symbolising experience in particular ways; describing; instructing; persuading.

The writing itself may be in any of several *forms* (such as notes, summaries, reports, poems, plays, stories, descriptive accounts of people, places or objects, letters or lists of instructions), so the criteria of assessment will need to be adapted to suit both the form of the writing and its purpose. A set of instructions, for example, would need to be well laid-out and sequenced accurately for ease of interpretation. Assessment would, therefore, tend to emphasize those features. On the other hand, an essay about a recently read book might be assessed according to how well the writer summarises the book's contents and dicusses his or her own reaction to it. Paragraphing and coherence would also be important.

Teachers must ensure that their pupils *know* what is going to be examined in their written work: for example, that this is a descriptive piece and accuracy of information and orderly discussion will count highest. Although it is often said that writing is a game and a test of one's ability to guess what the teacher wants, this attitude is not a worthy one. Criteria should be made explicit, and a careful watch has to be kept to make sure that unconscious criteria are not assuming greater importance than stated ones. To this end, markers need to (a) expose their 'standards', through self-examination; (b) communicate their criteria to their pupils so that the pupils can take them in; (c) keep a careful record of the *kinds* of comments they make on each pupil's 'essays' and of what they have done to assist the pupil's improvement.

(ii) Features of Writing

Some elementary distinctions are useful.

Mechanics

The 'surface' features mentioned before are often known as writing mechanics, or transcriptional features, since they represent those aspects of writing which are readily recognized as the basics of written communication. They include:

a. Handwriting

The legibility of the writing will range from uninterpretable to absolutely clear and easy to read. As it is usually the first feature of a piece of writing to be noticed (except, perhaps, for the overall layout of the whole communication), and creates an impression in the reader's mind about the writer's attitude to his or her task, it is easy to be misled by it. Unless the pupil is being assessed on handwriting alone, there seems to be little justification in making it part of any evaluation of writing quality, however hard the temptation to do so might be.

b. Punctuation

Inappropriate punctuation (ranging from the occasionally omitted comma to inability to distinguish one sentence from another — Mina Shaughnessy provides some excellent examples of such problems in *Errors and Expectations*) is another immediately recognizable feature of pupil's writing, found as much in university students' writing, it seems, as in primary schools. From the marker's point of view, continually misplaced commas and/or full-stops are a jarring note in any writing (with the exception of deliberate experiments with language as in some forms of 'creative' writing), since they actively impede comprehension.

c. Spelling

Incorrect spelling is another easily identifiable feature of writing, which many markers include as part of their assessment. The range of performance will be from no spelling mistakes to a plethora of errors. As with illegible handwriting, spelling mistakes give markers a hard job as they tend to counteract any positive impressions they might hold about a piece of writing.

d. Grammatical Usage

Wrong tense, wrong pronoun, inappropriate subject-verb agreement or other incorrect forms of words can also be labelled 'surface' features since they are easily identified and frequently commented upon, but seldom have the effect of destroying ideas or logical sequence.

e. Sentence Structure

This element is often counted as a 'surface' feature, including such things as sentence fragments, over use of 'and', misrelated clauses, etc. However, many of these aspects can be interpreted as punctuation difficulties or awkward usage.

While these features can easily impede understanding, and are often referred to as carelessness, they have very little to do with the *content* of a piece of writing, unless together they so obscure a writer's message that it cannot be understood at all, or only with extreme difficulty. It is best not to assess the quality of a piece of writing on this basis alone.

Content

The 'deep' features, however, are much more difficult to assess, and it is at this point that markers begin to diverge even more widely. Any balanced assessment needs to include a careful appraisal of these aspects. The problem is not so much that markers disagree about the choice of criteria but that they attach different weights to different traits. Although this is virtually an insoluble problem the most significant 'deep' features which ought to be considered in any assessment of writing are listed below without any attempt at ranking their importance in relation to each other.

a. *Ideas*

This feature includes qualities such as relevance, accuracy, fullness of treatment and originality of approach. However, it is often extremely difficult to assess the adequacy of a pupil's treatment of a topic. The negative features are often as prominent as the positive: irrelevent ideas, inaccurate representations of facts, excessive emphasis on insignificant points, a confused attitude towards the topic, etc. On the positive side satisfactory responses often differ a great deal in their treatment of the topic; how easy it is to give high marks to an essay in which the point of view agrees with your own and to penalise different approaches! It is also important to strike a balance between sheer volume of ideas and the quality of the ideas — hence the importance for some markers of the rather nebulous feature called originality.

b. *Organization*

A survey conducted by the author in 1979 revealed that university essay markers considered organization of material to be the biggest stumbling-block for many writers. The development of the ideas: how they are structured within the essay, appropriately dividing ideas into paragraphs, using contrast, introducing the main features of the topic, putting ideas in an appropriate order are all part of this feature. The haphazard grouping of ideas is likely to be assessed somewhat harshly by many teachers, while writing which 'flows' will probably be given higher marks. Markers should take care to be consistent in assessing this feature and consider if 'flowing' is more important than having new and powerful ideas.

c. *Word Choice*

Aspects of this feature are the use of appropriate terminology (i.e., adapted to the presumed audience of the writing); words which can be readily understood, with definitions included when deemed to be necessary; the avoidance of ambiguity, hackneyed expressions and redundancy; and the use of concise, clear words rather than long, obscure ones. Marks must depend to a certain extent on the clarity with which the purpose or context of the writing was made clear to the students.

d. *Style*

Perhaps the most difficult feature to assess is the 'flavour' of a piece of writing, i.e., how well the writer sustains his attitude or commitment, the suitability of the writing for its intended purpose and audience, the use of stylistic devices and the fluency displayed. Judgements on style are most likely to be highly subjective. The range of possibilities confronting the writer is very wide, and the effects of style on the marker are subject to influences beyond knowing.

The extent to which these features play a part in the overall assessment of the quality of a piece of writing remains a matter for individual teachers to determine. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that even though elaborate marking schemes (some of which are discussed in the following section) have been developed, the problem of whether a particular piece of writing *meets* the criteria or not still exists.

(iii) Marking Schemes

One of the hardest tasks an English teacher faces is deciding which aspects of writing are most important. For example, is style most important, or are the ideas the writer is putting forward more so? Some of the marking schemes currently in use will be briefly covered in this section in order to assist thinking about this problem.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of marking schemes, holistic (or impressionistic) and analytic (or atomistic). In analytic marking, a series of judgements is made about the pupil's writing according to a set of clearly specified criteria. Marks are awarded for each criterion or essay feature according to a predetermined scale, up to a stated maximum. This is probably the most useful approach for evaluating work done during the year, when diagnosis and appropriate assistance are most important. Impressionistic marking, on the other hand, simply requires a single judgement about the quality of a piece of writing, and is most useful for end-of-year assessments (see later section on Holistic Marking).

Analytic Marking

As an example of an analytic marking scheme, take a recent project undertaken in Canada, which developed criteria for the evaluation of different modes of writing for grades (years) 7 and 8 (Forms 2 and 3). Each criterion has been elaborated to make it easy to divide work into the categories of high, medium and low. The introduction includes the comment that 'we should like to see both teachers and students sensitive to the fact that certain writing tasks call for different styles, different language choices, and attention to particular skills each related to the *function* or purpose of the writing and the intended *audience*'. To illustrate the criteria, here is an excerpt from *Word Choice:*

Imaginative and Varied Language Choices: Grade 8

High:	Words and images which provide sharp and concrete pictures for the reader are frequent. Occasional experiments in stretching vocabulary and images to include new or unusual words or images. Trite expressions are usually eliminated. Flowery excesses — too many adjectives/adverbs piled on top of each other — are avoided.
Medium:	Generally word and image choice is at a more ordinary level with some experimentation, not always successful, in vocabulary expansion or creation of an image. The student still lacks full control and some excesses or redundancy may occur as well as the occasional trite, hackneyed expression.
Low:	Little experimentation with language. Reliance on the trite and very ordinary bland or abstract expression. Occasional errors in the use of standard vocabulary.

This publication includes the criteria Organization, Word Choice, Conventions and Mechanics, Content/Ideas, and Style, and also includes criteria related to specific modes in writing such as Narrative: Eye-witness account, real or imagined; Narrative: Second Person, with emphasis on description; Narrative: Third Person, emphasis on dialogue; and Exposition: Presentation of a viewpoint or argument (which covers six qualities — planning, argument, style,

sentence style, fairness or objectivity and freshness/originality). However, no criteria are suggested for 'free' writing, book reviews, reports, etc. It is also suggested that a scoring scale could be used, with pupils receiving points for each criterion as follows:

Organization	2	4	6	8	10
Language Choice	2	4	6	8	10
Sentence Variety	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar	1	2	3	4	5
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5

Possible score range: 7-35, if a composite score is thought useful.

One of the most well-known analytic scales is that of Diederich, as discussed in *Measuring Growth in English*, which looks like this:

	Low		Middle		High	
General Merit						
Ideas	2	4	6	8	10	
Organization	2	4	6	8	10	
Wording	1	2	3	4	5	
Flavour	1	2	3	4	5	____
Mechanics						
Usage	1	2	3	4	5	
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5	
Handwriting	1	2	3	4	5	____
					Total:	____

In addition to the table of points, a general description of high, medium and low performance is given for each criterion. Under 'Organization', for example, is this description:

High: The paper starts at a good point, has a sense of movement, gets somewhere and then stops. The paper has an underlying plan that the reader can follow; he is never in doubt as to where he is or where he is going. Sometimes there is a little twist near the end that makes the paper come out in a way that the reader does not expect, but it seems quite logical. Main points are treated at greatest length or with greatest emphasis, others in proportion to their importance.

Middle: The organization of this paper is standard and conventional. There is usually a one-paragraph introduction, three main points each treated in one paragraph, and a conclusion that often seems tacked on or forced. Some trivial points are treated in greater detail than important points, and there is usually some dead wood that might better be cut out.

Low: This paper starts anywhere and never gets anywhere. The main points are not clearly separated from one another, and they come in a random order — as though the student had not given any thought to what he intended to say before he started to write. The paper seems to start in one direction, then another, then another, until the reader is lost.

As an example of a 'surface' characteristic, the descriptions for 'Handwriting Neatness' are as follows:

High: The handwriting is clear, attractive, and well spaced, and the rules of manuscript form have been observed.

Middle: The handwriting is average in legibility and attractiveness. There may be a few violations of rules for manuscript form if there is evidence of some care for the appearance of the page.

Low: The paper is sloppy in appearance and difficult to read. It may be excellent in other respects and still get a low rating on this quality.

What these and similar 'analytic schemes' share is a reasonably elaborate description of those essay features expected for levels of writing quality. Although a composite score can be obtained for any piece of work analysed in this way, it is not likely to be very useful since pupils with the same mark could vary greatly in their handling of the individual features. Analytic marking, therefore, is most useful in classroom assessment when the reasons for the separate marks awarded are clearly explained to the pupil. If the application of this technique revealed class-wide deficiencies in one or other skill areas, further teaching could be organized to cover these points, as a back-up to the informal teacher-student dialogue conducted throughout the year.

A single mark or grade made by amalgamating all the analytic scores, however, is an insufficient indication to a pupil of his writing progress. Written comments would have to be added as well, in which a careful evaluation was made of both the good and inadequate aspects of the pupil's performance on that task. Diederich, for example, has shown that *the procedure with the most consistently positive effect on students' motivation is to correct* **one** *particular type of error, and to provide a comment on* **one** *particular strength in the student's piece of writing.* In this way the comments are more likely to be taken to heart and kept in mind by the student, particularly if they are presented in an encouraging manner. A study conducted by Page showed that students who receive individualized comments from the teacher obtain the highest scores, compared to students receiving automatic, impersonal comments (e.g., 'Good Work') or only a mark. The relationship between supportive feedback and student improvement is a subtle one, and Diederich's advice is especially worth noting.

2 Evaluating the Year's Performance

End-of-year grades or marks are not an integral part of the learning process. But they do provide an *estimate* of the amount and kind of learning achieved by the student, as their main function is usually to distinguish students from each other, to provide a comparison or ranking.

Holistic Marking

Evaluating writing skills is difficult because of the integrated nature of a piece of writing and differences in markers' approaches. The assessment technique which takes this into account is impressionistic (or holistic) marking. Research has shown that a rapid overall judgement of the quality of a piece of writing is as *reliable* a technique as the much slower method of analytic marking. Using this holistic technique, the marker reads quickly through each pupil's script in order to assign a mark or grade to it on the basis of his or her view of an adequate performance. Separate assessments of individual features are not made.

As a check on the consistency of the marking, essays can be sorted into three approximately equal piles representing good, average and poor efforts, with each of these piles being sorted again into three piles, making nine in all. Thus essays in pile 3 can be compared with pile 4, etc., to ensure that (a) there are differences in quality between each of the neighbouring piles and (b) essays within each pile are of similar quality. With practice this checking process can also be completed relatively quickly.

When a team of markers is involved in this activity, checks are required to ensure that all the markers have comparable standards. Normally this is done twice: once before any assessments are made so that everyone involved knows what is being looked for (that is, the criteria of adequate performance) and, secondly, after the assessments have been made in order to check for any large inter-marker differences. The range of marks awarded by each marker needs to be examined too. Obviously, some markers are more harsh in their judgements than others, and may use a more restricted range of marks in which, for example, the high ones tend to be avoided except perhaps for an outstanding response. Others will be more lenient, and may fail only students with excessively poor answers. Some bunch their marks around the middle. Consequently, it is necessary to be very clear about the characteristics expected of answers at each point of a scale, and to ensure that each marker agrees with them prior to assessment. Even then differences will probably occur. But although personal biases can never be completely removed, working closely with other teachers will assist the process of ironing out both foreseeable difficulties and any systematic bias due to identifiable idiosyncrasies.

What other sources of variation can be guarded against? The questions students are required to answer need to be devised very carefully. Rosen, for example, has shown that in a list of essays, from which a pupil is required to choose only one, different essays may make very different linguistic, content and organizational demands. It has also been shown that students, when given a choice of questions, do not necessarily answer the ones they can obtain their best marks on. Ambiguity in question phrasing has to be guarded against, too, as some pupils may interpret their tasks quite differently from other pupils when confronted with the same essay question, and do badly.

With especially important examinations, it is sometimes a healthy practice to use more than one marker. This reduces personal bias and, where a pupil has interpreted a question in an unusual fashion, for example, provides an alternative opinion of the quality of the pupil's writing. Multiple marking of the same papers is generally preferable to a single rating and does not take a long time when the impressionistic technique is used. It also results in greater consistency between markers in their assessments.

3 Performing an Evaluation: A Checklist

Consider these points carefully:

I *Why* are you making the evaluation?
Remember that initial assessments serve a different function from those made during the year, and especially from those which attempt to sum up a whole year's work. For example, is your evaluation designed to provide an overall judgement of a pupil's writing ability? If so, ideally it will be based on a *range* of writing tasks, as one task alone is hardly representative.

II What do you hope the *outcome* will be?
The way the information obtained will be used is probably more important than the method adopted. Is it mainly to help your students improve their writing skills, to widen your knowledge of their abilities, or to provide a means for comparing students with each other?

III Choosing appropriate techniques:

a. To obtain a deeper understanding of your pupils' writing ability, ask yourself the questions listed on page 2.
b. To assist pupils to improve their writing, follow the procedures listed on page 3.
c. When a mark is required on a piece of writing done during the year, work carefully from a set of explicit criteria. The features listed on pp. 4–5 will assist here, though they will have to be adapted for different class levels. The marking schemes on page 6 may also be useful.
d. Remember that positive written comments are required as well as marks. These should be recorded in the markbook too.
e. When assessing end-of-year work, be very clear about the criteria students are expected to meet (i.e., the characteristics of an adequate answer) and conscientiously try to avoid potential sources of inconsistency.
f. When part of a team of markers, work together both before and after your marking to remove idiosyncrasies due to different 'standards'.
g. Multiple marking of the same papers is a sound practice for especially important exams or assignments.

IV Some pitfalls to avoid:

a. Try not to focus solely on the 'mechanics' of writing. Excessive correction of pupils' written work is unlikely to induce better writing.
b. There is no need to assess everything that is written in the classroom. Formally evaluate only work considered by the student to be a finished effort. Allow students to revise, especially their coursework.
c. Do not mystify students by adopting marking 'standards' unknown to your pupils. Make your expectations known; make them reasonable!
d. Make sure questions and topics are not ambiguous; if they are, make allowance for this in your evaluations.

Notes

The quotation in the introduction is from the Ontario Ministry of Education, *Evaluation and the English Programme*, 1979, p.15.

Teaching and the Writing Process

Research on the writing process includes:

Cooper, C.R. and Odell, L. (eds.) *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*, N.C.T.E.: Illinois, 1978.

Emig, J. *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, N.C.T.E. Research Report, 13: Illinois, 1971.

Graves, D.H. 'An Examination of the Writing Processes of Seven Year Old Children', *Research in the Teaching of English*, 9,3, 1975, pp. 227-241.

Graves, D.H. *Balance the Basics: Let Them Write*, Ford Foundation: New York, 1978.

Collins and Gentner's study, 'A Framework for a Cognitive Theory of Writing' can be found in:

Gregg, L.W. and Steinberg, E.R. *Cognitive Processes in Writing*, Erlbaum: New Jersey, 1979.

Some useful references on assisting the developing writer are:

Hillerich, R.L. 'Developing Written Expression: How to Raise—not Raze—Writers', *Language Arts*, 56,7, October 1979, pp. 769-777.

Stibbs, A. *Assessing Children's Language*, Ward Lock Educational: London, 1979.

Thornton, G. *Teaching Writing: The Development of Written Language Skills*, Edward Arnold: London, 1980.

The importance of revision as part of the writing process is discussed in:

Calkins, L.M. 'Children's Rewriting Strategies', *Research in the Teaching of English*, 14,4, December, 1980.

Graves, D.H. 'What Children Show Us About Revision', Research Update, *Language Arts*, 56,3, March, 1979.

While Mina Shaughnessy discusses the kinds of mistakes made by first year College students in New York, many of her observations and recommendations are particularly useful for teachers of all levels in New Zealand and Australia. They are presented in:

Shaughnessy, M.P. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*, Oxford University Press: New York, 1977.

What Influences the Awarding of Marks?

Research on this topic is extensive, particularly on the reliability of essay markers. The references given here are a tiny selection only.

The effects of 'surface' features on markers, for example, can be found in:

Briggs, D. 'The Influence of Handwriting on Assessment', *Educational Research*, 13, 1970, pp. 50-55.

Marshall, J.C. and Powers, J.M. 'Writing Neatness, Composition Errors, and Essay Grades', *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 5, 1969, pp. 97-101.

For the effects of different marking criteria, see these early studies:

Diederich, P., French, J.W. and Carlton, S. 'Factors in Judgements of Writing Ability', *E.T.S. Research Bulletin*, 61.65: Princeton, N.J., 1961.

Remondino, C. 'A Factorial Analysis of the Evaluation of Scholastic Compositions in the Mother Tongue', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 29, 1959, pp. 242-251.

A useful summary of inter-marker and intra-marker reliability (i.e., marking differences in the same person), with special reference to essays is:

Cowie, Colin. 'Using the Essay as an Assessment Technique', *set* 77, no. 1, NZCER, 1977.

Assessment Techniques

(i) The analytic marking schemes described can be found in:

Diederich, P. *Measuring Growth in English*, N.C.T.E.: Illinois, 1974.

Evans, P.J., Brown, P. and Marsh, M. *Criteria for the Evaluation of Student Writing, Grades 7 & 8, A Handbook*, O.I.S.E., 1977.

(ii) For holistic marking see:

Cooper, C.R. 'Holistic Evaluation of Writing' in *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging*, edited by C.R. Cooper and L. Odell, N.C.T.E.: Illinois, 1977.

Greenhalgh, C. and Townsend, D. 'Evaluating Students' Writing Holistically — An Alternative Approach', *Language Arts*, 58,7, October 1981, pp. 811-822.

(iii) A standard reference for teachers interested in essays as an examination technique is:

Coffman, W.E. 'Essay Examinations' in *Educational Measurement*, edited by R.L. Thorndike, American Council on Education: Washington, 2nd ed. 1971.

(iv) The importance of comments teachers make is discussed by:

Searle, D. and Dillon, D. 'Responding to Student Writing: What is Said or How it is Said', *Language Arts*, 57,7, October 1980, pp. 773-781.

Wade, B. 'Responses to Written Work: The Possibilities of Utilizing Pupils' Perceptions', *Educational Review*, 30,2, 1978, pp. 149-158.

Wade also cites the findings of Page and Rosen.

Evaluation of the Process of Writing

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Ideology and Assessment

AS EDUCATORS our view of what constitutes writing, and development in writing, is reflected in how we teach and how we assess the children's work.

If we see writing primarily as a functional form of communication, we teach specific discrete skills like punctuation and grammar; we ask our students to read and examine examples of good writing practice, then to attempt to model them. The main form of assessment will be examining written products with a view to improving their quality.

But, if we see writing as a tool for thinking and understanding, a process by which the writer's own ideas are transformed and, as a skill, honed over time, then we will teach and assess differently. Teaching will be based on the notion of learning by doing, the idea that children learn to write more effectively if they follow the same process as mature writers. Assessment will try to reflect how students are handling this process, with a view to supporting its development.

Thus, views and assumptions about writing have implications for assessment.

Current Practice

An example of official aims for assessment practice comes from a New Zealand task force on evaluation. *Tomorrow's Standards* contains elements of each of the above views of writing. The report talks of nationally-based, criterion-referenced tasks assessing important basic skills where, presumably, the emphasis is functional writing. But also emphasised is the diagnostic function of

assessment, namely, to provide information which identifies strengths and weaknesses. In addition to 'nationally normed outcomes (standardised tests)' for writing, a variety of assessment tasks is suggested. There is recognition that tasks or instruments which can be used in the regular classroom are likely to be more sensitive diagnostic indicators than assessments on a large scale.

Such classroom-based measures include observation of the process (through, for example, conferences between teacher and child, and teacher-designed checklists) as well as evaluation of outcomes. In New Zealand the Primary Progress records have learning goals for writing which reflect the need for formative, process-driven measures. But assessment of writing in the secondary school, so enmeshed in the tradition of national awards, has been overwhelmingly concerned with summative assessment of a product. Product assessment is not very useful for diagnosis. For example, end product evaluation describes, but fails to explain, changes to text, like why less experienced writers make changes largely at the level of mechanics, leaving the quality of the piece unchanged, while mature writers revise at a whole-text level making meaning-based changes.

Teachers as observers: the log in the head

The most significant evaluation record is in a teacher's head', claims Jan Turbill. She defends the use of the teacher's impressions, and other subjective assessment, when supplemented with, for example, continuous records and daily performance samples. I think she is right : evaluation of both product and process is important. However, diagnostic assessment utilising both sources of evidence is a considerable challenge to the classroom teacher.

If informal, teacher-based assessment is to be emphasised, then teachers must develop as sensitive observers. Whilst designing a questionnaire instrument to assist English teachers make assessments, I was given, unexpectedly, an indication of how sensitive a group of secondary teachers were.

The questionnaire was to help teachers with assessments appropriate to a profile of student strengths and weaknesses in aspects of the writing process. The rationale was that teachers are in a position to observe evidence of students wrestling with the cognitive and linguistic demands of writing. A teacher may have observedl a student who often cannot think what to write about, or a student whose piece trails off or comes to an abrupt halt. The questionnaire items asked about such students and their difficulties because they are likely indicators of memory search problems. Research (from the work of Carl Bereiter and Marlene Scardamalia at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) shows that primary school children lack the ability to conduct 'meta-memorial' search, that is, they cannot rapidly examine the contents of memory in order to determine whether they know a little or a lot about a given topic. Hence they may start writing and be well into a piece before they realise that they have no more to say. Accustomed to a conversational partner, children often have not developed a system of generating content which functions autonomously. They may need a lot of prompting and another question asks about this. If writers generate content using the strategy, adapted from conversation, of 'What shall I say next?' they do not readily produce coherent writing. Questions in the questionnaire dealt with aspects of planning like this.

Similarly, there were items which ask what teachers have observed about the revision process: 'Does the student re-scan or re-read work to review during the writing process?' 'Does the student settle on the first version generated?', and so on.

The questionnaire

The Teacher Evaluation of Student Writing Ability Questionnaire (TESWAQ) consisted of 36 items, derived from the literature on writing. Each item took the form of a statement with a five point scale to measure the extent to which the student writer exhibited the particular characteristic. The questions covered six dimensions:

(i) attitude to writing,
(ii) the ability to search memory for and to generate content,
(iii) planning and structure,
(iv) the extent to which the writer is sensitive to the needs of an audience,
(v) style (which included choice of vocabulary, use of a variety of structures and adherence to conventions) and,
(vi) ability to evaluate and revise.

Teachers were asked to consider each statement carefully in the light of the variety of occasions and writing situations in which they had observed the student and the variety of different pieces of work they had seen. They were asked to try not to form and use a global impression but to consider each item individually. Ten teachers assessed a selection of their students. Four teachers taught English at Form 2/Year 7 level (average age 12:6); four taught Form 4/Year 9 (average age 14:7) while two taught predominantly Sixth Form/Year 11 and 12 (average age 17). Teachers were left this questionnaire to complete at their leisure so they had the opportunity to check out their perceptions.

Teacher responses

Teachers had no trouble using the scale and the items certainly discriminated among students. For every item, all points on the one to five scale were used and, for each item, the pattern of choices was normally distributed.

However, at the outset some teachers commented that the task was difficult, largely because they felt they did not have any (or sufficient) information on a number of items. This was reflected in the overall pattern of their responses. Perhaps because of their view of writing or their training and experience to date, these teachers seemed to rely on a global impression of a student's writing ability. This is what the results of an analysis of their assessments suggested. The analysis showed that the instrument was internally highly consistent (Cronbach's alpha = .98). That is, each individual student was given almost the same score on all items.

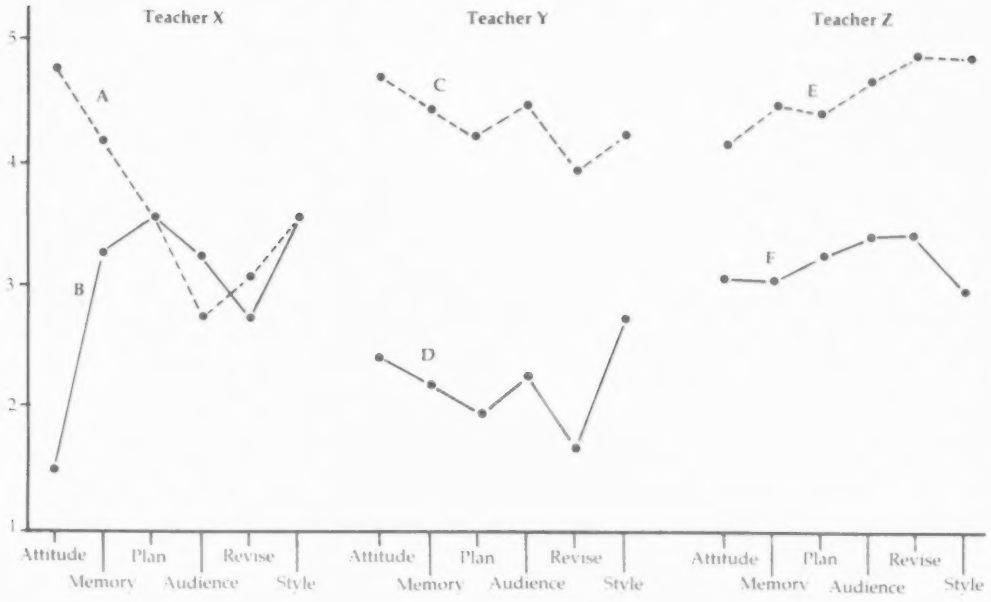
This questionnaire purportedly examined six different dimensions of writing ability, but showed extremely high internal consistency.

There are two likely explanations. Either there are no separate dimensions of writing ability, that is a student's performance is completely consistent over each of the different dimensions, or alternatively, the teachers were unable to differentiate, perhaps through being unduly influenced by a global impression of writing ability. As, logically, one would not expect a student to master all aspects of a complex skill at the same rate, it looks as if we have to be concerned at the insensitivity of teacher observations. Are some teachers more able to assess the different aspects of writing ability, while others are less able to do so?

Unfortunately, there were not many ways I could investigate this question because of the small sample of teachers, and students per teacher. So I sought further evidence by looking at profiles of student strengths and weaknesses, using the six dimensions, to see if there were patterns characteristic of teachers. An example of two student profiles

Figure 1

Student profiles showing teacher assessed performance on aspects of writing



from each of three different teachers is shown in Figure 1.

The patterns are informative. Teacher X sees attitude as distinct from other dimensions and the two students have different patterns of strengths and weaknesses. Teachers Y and Z rate their students' abilities on the different dimensions of writing within a small range, and there is a similar pattern of strengths and weakness for each of the two students although one is clearly perceived as better than the other in each teacher's case. It appears that the assessment focus of these latter teachers is relativity. How one student performs in relation to another, is most important to them, not the relative strengths and weaknesses of each individual student.

Implications for teacher-based assessment

It is acknowledged that the teacher sample was small, but it was reasonably representative. It seems that for the 'log in the head' to be a valid method of evaluation it needs to be fine-tuned. As I found the log, it was too global to be useful for diagnostic assessment. Teachers need to acquire sufficient knowledge about the thought processes going on during the act of writing to enable them to become sensitive observers of the process. If you can note instances (like each behaviour asked about in the questionnaire) and understand what each indicates about the underlying process, then you can devise a strategy to support the writer. For example, if the writer has memory-related content retrieval problems try such strategies as single word brainstorming, conversational support and prompts (sometimes just 'and' or 'can you tell me more?') to help the child search his or her memory. Other prompts can be designed to help the child search in a structured, branching fashion.

Understanding cognitive processes

Understanding cognitive processes is vital in order to support developing writers. The questionnaire asked the teachers to rate behaviour associated with revision and knowing your audience. These are integral to the development of students as successful evaluators of their own writing.

In the broad sense, this self-evaluation process can be seen as re-vision, a re-seeing of your own writing. Revision may be applied to ideas and plans as well as produced tests, and occur at any point during writing. It includes evaluating and revising and requires a writer to detect a problem, diagnose it and select a strategy, before taking action.

Student writers as evaluators

Constant evaluation and reworking are the lot of a skilled writer. But the average student will look askance if you suggest such. Donald Graves describes their response as a 'why-tinker-with-perfection?' look. School students seldom spontaneously revise a piece. Findings suggest that when they do revise they make changes to words and phrases and little else, with the emphasis on mechanics. Furthermore, attempts to effect changes to a piece do not necessarily improve it. Unfortunately, research on this topic has been rather narrow and descriptive. It has tried to specify alterations and how such alterations vary across different ages and abilities. An explanation of why children change words and not ideas is problematical. Research I have carried out suggests that students, up to late secondary, have limited internalised criteria for 'good' writing; they evaluate their work using these limited standards, and this stymies the whole revision process. In addition, it may be that some writers have difficulty with the complex cognitive and linguistic demands of evaluation and revision.

How might teachers support self evaluation and revision?

Our usual response to writing, as teachers, is to talk about it to the writer or make comments on the finished product. (Peers also respond to writing.) This strategy is premised on the hope that talk and comments about aspects of writing will be internalised by the students who, subsequently, will use this information to regulate their own writing processes. They will 'give themselves a conference', as it were. But does using such a strat-

egy mean they understand the underlying thought processes? Perhaps what needs to be cultivated is knowledge of the mental processes which underlie the activity of writing. Scardamalia, Bereiter and colleagues talk of fostering self-knowledge and regulation by directing students' attention to cognitive processes.

To date, we have only one rough description of the major thinking processes involved in writing. The model is proposed by Hayes and Flower. Briefly, the model describes three major mental acts - planning, translating and reviewing which can be both interactive and iterative. The study described below is a way of defining the processes a writer goes through in evaluation and revision, a way that may be useful for diagnosis and instruction.

Cognitive thought processes in evaluation and revision

The research was designed to establish what cognitive skills a writer must use to evaluate and revise writing. Five thought processes or skills were considered to be central to successful revision.

1. The first of these skills involved **extracting the gist.** Revision involves a language system which works iteratively using its own output as input. Although the output might be ideas or pre-text, central to evaluation is rereading *text written*, in order to test it against (a) *intended text* and (b) *internalised criteria* for good writing. Research has shown the most effective attempts to reconstruct *text written* to be those which encapsulated the underlying message of the text in a gist form. This involves using rules which specify what to select and what to delete. Also it often involves inventing an overarching phrase or term which subsumes lots of detail.

2. The reason for constructing a mental representation of text-to-date is to compare this with a representation of text intended. And what you intend to write may be well planned or poorly planned. A major part of this planning involves elaborating the rhetorical situation, **critically constructing the inferred psychological characteristics of the audience in order to match these to an appropriate message.** This was the second cognitive skill.

3. The specialised re-reading of text, in order to evaluate, involves more than simply reading from the viewpoint of an audience or testing for comprehensibility. Detecting deficiencies in text involves attending to both the content, or meaning, and also to the form. Often giving attention to meaning dominates, and evaluation, detection and correction are hindered. The use of predictable sentence structures and broader text structures as an information-handling technique may offset the constraints of limited capacity. Knowledge of structural patterns (sentence and text) is implicated in comprehension and written production and such structural patterns may aid the detection of errors. This skill was termed **utilising organisational structures.**

4. After a writer has evaluated appropriately, and recognised a deficiency, remedial action usually takes the form of generating alternatives to the offending words. These alternatives have to be generated despite a potent barrier – the words already thought up and written down. **Fluency of ideas,** especially when faced with previous attempts, is recognised as a vital cognitive skill.

5. Finally, generating these alternatives is not like algorithmic problem solving where there is only one solution. Rather it is a case of generating several solutions and testing for appropriateness – **making comparisons among alternatives** is the skill you need. These comparisons involve representing how the text will appear, with each alternative in turn.

Relationship of cognitive skills to evaluation and revision

To look at these skills of evaluation and revision I selected three groups of students; 40 Form 2/Year 7 students, 40 Form 4/Year 9 students and a minimum of 76 Form 6-7/Year 11-12 students. Each student completed five paper and pencil tasks designed to measure the skills outlined above and also a task designed to measure how successfully they could make changes to texts.

Analyses established that each of these skills was significantly related to the ability to make successful changes to text. Performance on the tasks tapping the cognitive thought processes were shown to differentiate good from poor revisers.

Implications

Establishing the likely major cognitive processes involved in evaluation and revision provides the basis for a more detailed descriptive model. The use of such a description is two-fold: (a) the description could be used as a basis for a closer understanding of what it is that a writer must do in order to revise; (b) variants of the tasks devised for the research, could be used for diagnostic assessment.

Fostering self-knowledge and regulation by directing students' attention to cognitive processes enriches their language experience in a directed, active fashion. The aim is to use instructional procedures designed to bring these cognitive processes into the open. For example, make up activities that increase students' sensitivity to audience needs by having them infer the psychological needs of an audience. Then match these needs to an appropriate message. Or try reading a flawed text and predicting the reader's problems.

In a nutshell

The implication from both of these studies is that a sound understanding of the detailed thought processes involved while writing is necessary, both for diagnostic assessment and in order to provide directed instructional support.

Notes

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Recent examples from the work of researchers, in order referred to, are:

Turbill, Jan (1985) *No better way to teach writing*. N.S.W. Primary English Teaching Association.

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Writers at Risk

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Writers at Risk

Including an Assessment Method for Teachers and Researchers to Identify the Strengths and Weaknesses of Young Writers

By Carol Adler
Missoula, Montana

Several groups of children are at high risk of inadequate progress in written language. Some children of average intelligence (9.4 percent of boys) fall further and further behind their peers as they get older. They need special help. How can they be identified? How can we give assistance?

As recipient of a Rotary Foundation Award and as a Fulbright Research Scholar I was able to study the written language of children in Dunedin, New Zealand, and in Montana, USA, assessing their growth in writing over a period of three years. To arrive at my conclusion about high risk writers I had first to create a way of accurately assessing writing skills. The technique I used – analytic marking – was found by teachers who evaluated the research scripts and by others who were given workshops on the assessment technique, to be very useful to them in their classrooms. In this *set* item I will describe the technique, how I used it in my research, and report how some of the teachers adapted the technique.

Part I – Marking Methods

If you read quickly through a piece of writing and give it a mark, you are using a general impression, holistic or global method. If you read through and score different features of the writing (spelling, sentence structure, development of ideas, vocabulary, and so on, see figure 1), allocating a mark to each, you are using an analytic method. The single score from the general impression assessment and the total of the analytic marks are usually very similar.

Why then does anyone bother with analytic marking? It can be slower and requires more effort. The main reason is that general impression marking is little help in day-to-day teaching; a global mark is of marginal benefit to the pupil. If separate skills have been rated, specific feedback can be provided, showing strengths in written language as well as areas needing improvement. For example, if the mark for development of ideas is low, the teacher knows to direct attention to the expansion of ideas within the pupil's whole writing. If the punctuation score is high, no extra attention to punctuation is currently required.

Different Emphases

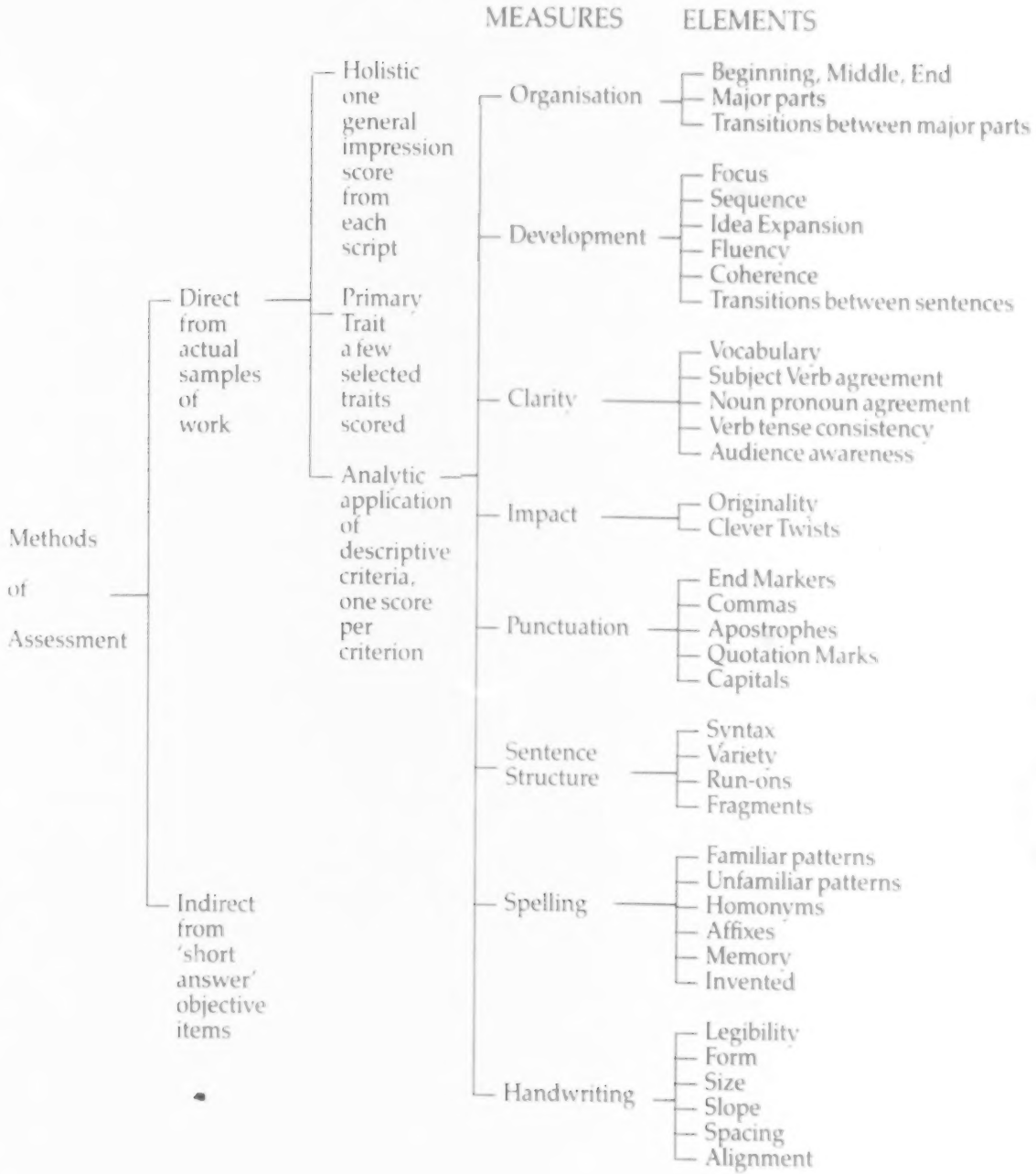
Teachers differ in their philosophies of what is important in the teaching of writing. Yet these differences need not prevent them from using an analytic method of marking. One philosophy may emphasize writing as a way of helping pupils expand their thinking. Another may attend more to concise communication. Of course, no teacher will promote some writing abilities totally at the expense of others. The outcome is a matter of emphasis. There are two main ways of giving emphasis to your philosophy of writing while using the analytic assessment method.

If you are using a ready-made analytic scheme with the descriptive criteria developed by someone else, such as the one used in my research, first check that the criteria do include those that express your philosophy of what represents writing. If there are some criteria missing, add them.

Secondly, you may find it helpful to more heavily weight the criteria which you wish to emphasize with your pupils. For example,

Figure 1

A Schema for Assessing Written Language



while using all of the criteria in her marking, Joanne, teaching 11-year-olds, gave added weight to different criteria when marking different assignments. In an assignment requiring the students to describe a science experiment, she focused on the criteria of Organisation and Development (especially the element of Sequence), giving these criteria more weight in the marking and other criteria less weight. When the assignment involved creative composition, the criteria of Originality and Clever Twists were weighted more heavily than the others.

Part II – The Dunedin Research

The Sample

A total of 592 children (272 girls and 320 boys) from most Dunedin-area schools participated in the research. The sample consisted of children who are members of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study sample. These children have been studied from birth. The sample is known to be slightly socio-economically advantaged in comparison with the rest of New Zealand and is under-representative of Maori and other Polynesian people.

The Procedures

Written instructions were provided to the principals and teachers, along with instructions to be read to the children. The children were informed of the purpose of the writing: to provide scripts to a group of people who want to learn more about written language. The children were also told that no marks would be given to their scripts by their classroom teachers. Directions were printed on the cover of the writing booklet which was provided for each child. (The directions were also read to the children as an 'insurance' for those with reading difficulties.) Inside the booklet was a picture to stimulate their writing, followed by two and a half pages of lines. The picture (See figure 2) was a three-colour line drawing of an imaginary creature, captioned: 'Here is a picture of a creature. It can be

Figure 2

anything you want it to be. It can do anything you want it to do. Write a story about this creature.' The topic provided an opportunity for a wide range of written expression and did not require any special knowledge of a particular subject. Each child was asked to write for 30 minutes. All children wrote in their respective schools at a designated time and under conditions established for the research. Each of the 592 children wrote at age 9 and again at age 12. To control the research conditions, the first-draft scripts were used, although the children were reminded to allow themselves five minutes to complete their stories and to proof-read them.

The Development of the Scoring Measures

A close examination was made of the scripts written at both ages, 9 and 12. Descriptions of what was written were carefully drafted and the characteristics of high, middle and low quality writing set down. The results can be seen in the 'Descriptive Criteria', pp.15-22. These elements were grouped to form the eight categories (in figure 1) and these categories became the measures used to assess the written language. Therefore, the scoring criteria were written from the children's actual writing samples. All of the descriptive criteria for the eight scoring measures were compiled into a booklet called the Reader's Handbook. The handbook also included sample scripts which illustated varying degrees of performance in each of the measures.

The Assessment of Scripts

Three Dunedin teachers were selected to read and score the scripts. Their selection was based upon their interest and experience in language arts. The Reader's Handbook was used as a manual during their two days of training, and as a guide during assessment. They learnt (1) to identify the ability level the child showed in each of the eight categories, (2) to guard against allowing a pupil's ability in one category to influence their judgements in other categories, and (3) to agree among themselves on the interpretation of the descriptive criteria. Before assessment, all scripts written at ages 9 and 12 were mixed together and no identifying information was available to the readers.

Each of the 1184 scripts (592 × 2) was marked independently by each of the three readers, one category at a time. Therefore, each script received 24 scores (8 categories × 3). The average scoring time was 2½ minutes per script.

The Results

The following summary states the main results of the study:

Technical

1. Agreement among all three readers was .86 for age 9 scores and .85 for age 12 scores (Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance). These agreements are well within those accepted in other studies.
2. The eight measures were highly intercorrelated, producing one main factor, written language. This factor explained 73% of the variance for age 9 scores and 75% of the variance for age 12 scores.

The Children

3. The children, on average, improved as writers in all measures except Handwriting.
4. The average number of words increased from 173 at age 9 to 287 at age 12, an increase of 66%.

5. The correlations between age-9 and age-12 scores showed that improvement in story writing was more predictable in Sentence Structure than in the other measures and less predictable in the Number of Words written.
6. Girls' scores were significantly higher than boys' scores in all measures except for Handwriting.
7. The 'gap' between scores of girls and boys was essentially the same at age 12 as at age 9. (Exception – Handwriting: The Girls' scores increased slightly and the boys' scores declined slightly.)
8. The strongest predictors of written language performance at age 12 were written language at age 9 and reading and spelling at age 11. Undesirable behaviour showed a weak relationship with written language. Socio-economic status showed no meaningful relationship to writing ability.

Those Who Scored Low

9. Children with low writing scores were identified. Because relatively few girls scored low, only boys were selected for further study. They were placed into four groups.

   Group 1 scored in the lower 15% at ages 9 and 12 and had intelligence scores of less than 90. This group showed a general cognitive delay and were 5.3% of all the boys in the study.

   Group 2 scored in the lower 15% at ages 9 and 12 and had intelligence scores of 90 or more. They also scored low in reading, spelling, listening, and maths. They were 6.6% of all the boys.

   Group 3 had written language scores 1.5 or more standard errors below the scores predicted for them, based on their intelligence and reading scores. *They scored low in writing only.* They were 9.4% of all the boys.

   As well, all three delayed groups scored *lower* at age 12 than the remainder of the boys scored at age 9.

   Group 4 consisted of the remainder of boys in the sample.
10. The total written language scores for each of the four groups were compared. Children in Groups 1 and 2 tended to progress steadily but slowly. Group 3 showed less relative progress than any of the groups.

    Despite their average general ability the boys in Group 3 (low

in writing only) made less progress than would have been expected (see figure 3). This is the group about which we must be very concerned.

We badly need further research involving other groups of children who show problems in written language. Children such as those identified in Group 3 (low scores in written language only) may be hard to identify in school because they are not performing as poorly in written language as those children who have overall academic delays.

The number of boys and girls found who have average intelligence but who scored significantly low in written language was 10.3%. This calls for attention to identify and assist these children.

The results of this study suggest the importance of (1) early success in writing for all children, (2) early identification of writing difficulties, and (3) intervention, to provide the maximum direct assistance to those children at risk of failure.

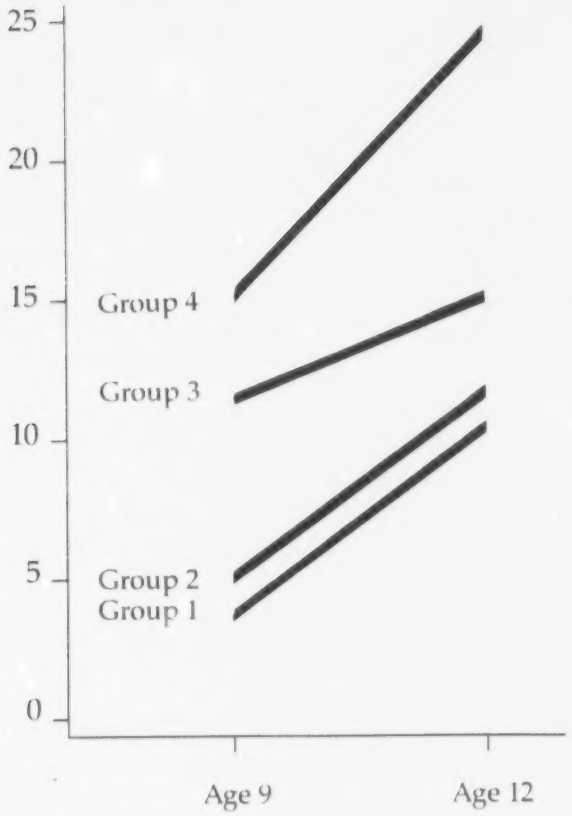
As teachers, I believe we must take special care to avoid labelling children as disabled. However, it is through continued diagnostic teaching that we will recognize specific areas in which each child needs additional support.

These results prompt the following questions:

1. When a child is recognised in class as delayed in language abilities, is the delay recognised as (i) general, or (ii) specific?
2. Do these groups of children have different educational needs?
3. What assistance is provided to these children?
4. Are these children given assistance early in their schooling when it may be most critical?
5. What assistance is provided to classroom teachers who recognise these needs?

Figure 3

Mean Total Written Language Scores of Four Groups at Age 9 and Age 12



Group	Mean	
1[a]	4.5	9.9
2[b]	5.0	11.2
3[c]	11.3	14.7
4[d]	15.0	24.2

[a] Boys with low written language scores and IQ < 90 (N = 16)
[b] Boys with low written language scores and IQ > 89 (N = 21)
[c] Boys with actual written language scores below predicted scores (N = 30)
[d] Remainder of boys in sample (N = 249)

Part III – The Assessment Process

To apply the descriptive criteria, the following steps are recommended for an individual teacher or a group of teachers. (The process is generally more effective and enjoyable when it involves a group.)

1. Select narrative writings from children aged 9 to 12.
2. Read the descriptive criteria provided in this article. (See pages 15 to 22.)
3. Read the criteria for low, middle, and high for one measure, for example, Organisation.
4. Read a script. When beginning write a few specific notes about the quality of the script but only in relation to the descriptors that go with Organisation: note the development of the beginning, middle and end of the script; does the beginning actually introduce and middle develop the story? Is there an ending to the story? Is it effective even though abrupt? What are the identifiable parts within the script? What transition words are used to connect the parts? Decide on a score, only in that measure, using a 0-5 scale with 5 high.
5. Do the same for each of the next seven measures.
   Only while you are learning to apply the criteria do you need to write descriptive notes. As you become proficient in scoring and internalize the criteria for each measure, you will not need notes. Your speed of assessing will rapidly increase. In the research, the time required to assess a story of approximately 200 to 250 words, scoring each of 8 measures, was 2½ minutes.

   While becoming familiar with the assessment process, work towards (1) identifying levels (high, medium, low) in each of the eight measures without allowing the child's success in one measure to influence your judgements in other measures; (2) interpreting descriptive criteria with agreement among your team (e.g., groups of three teachers from the same school or the same class level). Team agreement in scoring determines the reliability of the assessment tool. Agreement among readers is defined as scores in each category not more than one point apart. Try to reach this agreement approximately 75% of the time. When

you rescore the same script, agreement with your *own* scores should reach 90%. This training session may take as little as one and one-half hours. Ideally, one day should be available to allow time to reach team reliability.

6. The descriptive criteria applied to the narrative writing can be applied to other types of writing. You can tell if the criteria are suitable or if they require adjustment.

7. Once familiar with the criteria and scoring process, you can write criteria for your own purposes and your own curricula, using scripts of your choice from which to develop the criteria. The criteria may be extended to include scripts by children of other ages.

   Criteria can be written on first-draft scripts or on revised works. You may find it helpful to have both sets of criteria – a set of 'before' and 'after' to compare writing abilities without and with revision.

Part IV – Classroom Use

The following descriptions are accounts of how some teachers adapted the descriptive criteria and process for use in their classrooms. The method was always accompanied with warmth and encouragement.

Joanne explained the descriptive criteria to her class of 11- and 12-year-olds. They discussed specific writing samples to illustrate the criteria. She used the children's writing assignments in her progress reports to parents, showing them the strengths and weaknesses in the child's written language development.

Margaret's students were 8- and 9-year-olds. The assessment process provided the children with a sense of ownership of their own writing. Four times in the year the children used the process for assessing their *efforts* in specific writing areas. Margaret also used the process as a basis for individual conferences with her pupils, matching their assessments of their efforts with her assessment of their *achievements*. Together they set writing goals. The effort and

achievement marks were included in their progress report to parents.

Elaine, Jan and Joy devised charts to record and report how their pupils were getting on. The charts were used to assist teachers, children and parents to see in what areas of written language the writers showed strengths and in what areas improvement was needed.

Jan's pupils were 7- and 8-year-olds. Despite their youth, they understood simple versions of the descriptive criteria and learnt to apply them to their own work. She attributed improvement in the children's writing to their fuller understanding of written expression.

Joy also taught 7- and 8-year-olds. She attached reporting sheets to most pieces of writing done by her pupils. Key words from the descriptive criteria were written, with scores and comments, and all were returned to the children. She kept a chart illustrating the whole class's progress. She found an improvement in the children's motivation to write well. At the same time, she gained clear information of each child's writing and which aspects needed instruction and assistance.

As a closing statement, I offer the following: the assessment method is not revolutionary nor is it difficult to employ. It is my hope that its use defines and organises knowledge of written language into a practical, efficient, and helpful process.

The Descriptive Criteria

Organisation

Beginning, Middle, End
Major Parts
Transitions between major parts

Low

This script generally has no distinction between the beginning, middle, or end. It usually gives a concrete description of the creature and/or lists what the creature can do.

No chunks of expression are identifiable. There is no paragraphing.

Middle

This script shows some definition of beginning, middle, and end. There is generally a brief introduction with the remainder of the script comprising the body. The body may have a loosely-developed plot. Sometimes the introduction is quite long, with a very under-developed body. The ending is generally identifiable, but it is ineffective and abrupt.

Chunks of expression are loosely identifiable. Paragraphing is generally not used, although sometimes a new line is used, without indentation, to begin a new chunk of expression or dialogue.

Transitions between chunks of expression are generally limited to "one day" and used to begin the body of the story.

High

This script has an identifiable beginning, middle, and end. The beginning is often fairly well developed. The largest amount of the script is the body. A plot is generally well developed throughout the story. The ending is apparent although abrupt and not as effective as the beginning or middle.

Chunks of expression are identifiable but usually not set into paragraphs. Occasionally each new speaker is given a new line for the dialogue.

Transition words between chunks of expression are somewhat varied and usually include words beyond merely time indicators.

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Development Of Ideas

Focus
Sequence
Idea expansion
Fluency
Coherence
Transitions between sentences

Low

The story rambles. There is no focus other than the most general, describing the creature's appearance or listing series of events.

There is no apparent plan for sequence other than listing events or describing the creature. The sentences tend to be parallel in importance. Sequence is generally based on no more than chronology.

There is generally no central theme or plot which is expanded. The information seems flat rather than having a point which is built by supporting detail. If there is a central point, it is not well supported by details.

The story is jerky and choppy; the sentences do not flow.

Coherence is lost because parts within the story do not relate well to each other.

There are few words which link one sentence to the next. These words are generally limited to time denoters, such as: then, when, so, one day, next day.

Middle

A general focus is maintained, although several semi-related events may compete for focus. If only one theme is apparent, the focus tends to wander; focus is not sharp.

Sequence shows some plan and a basis beyond listing parallel events. Sequence may be based upon the author's logical thoughts, cause-effect, or some other reason other than a pure chronology of events.

A central point of the story may be general, rather than specific, with fairly vivid details to develop and support the general idea; or the story may have a specific focus with less well-developed supportive detail.

Fluency is shown by the sentences flowing fairly smoothly.

Coherence is seen through sentences which relate to one another. Coherence may be based on time indicators which relate one sentence to the next, or it may be through non-time indicators which relate the sentences by the developing idea.

Some time indicators are used to link sentences, but the linking words are expanding to include such words as: suddenly, on his way home, well, for hours, but, as also, as you can see.

High

The focus is sharp and vivid. A central theme is clearly portrayed. The story

tends to make a specific point rather than give a global view.

This script is much like the Middle script except its sequence is more clear-cut and less inclined to veer from the major plan.

A plot or theme is specific rather than general and the main idea is well developed through supportive detail which is clear and usually vivid.

Each sentence flows smoothly into the next.

Each part of the story has a common bond with the other parts. There is a literary tightness about the whole story; it is "glued together" properly.

Transition (linking) words show a variety and maturity beyond the frequently-used transitional words. Examples are: meanwhile, gradually, somehow, carefully, as a result, eventually.

Clarity

Variety and precision of words
Subject-verb agreement
Noun-pronoun agreement
Verb tense consistency
Consideration of audience

Low

Vocabulary often consists ot commonly over-used words (e.g., went, had, saw) and those which are general in nature, creating a rather flat, dull effect. The types of words are almost evenly divided between nouns (including proper), adjectives, and action verbs.

This script tends to be more difficult to understand due to some noun-pronoun confusion and sometimes some tense shifts (most often due to a shift from third-person narrator to first-person speaker). Occasionally there are subject-verb disagreements (e.g., "There is windows . . ."), although these grammatical difficulties are also seen in higher scripts.

There is no evidence of awareness of writing for an audience.

Middle

The vocabulary is more varied, colourful, and specific than in the Low scripts. Types of words are, as with Low scripts, fairly evenly divided between nouns, adjectives, and action verbs, although there are more of each than in the Low scripts. Adverbs are beginning to appear (e.g., immediately, cautiously).

Although this script may have minor difficulties in consistent verb tense, noun-pronoun agreement or subject-verb agreement, the difficulties do not generally impair the clarity of the message.

A few scripts show the beginning of audience awareness. E.g., "Tune in next week for the continuing saga of . . ."

High

Vocabulary is varied, colourful, and specific. There are usually a few more adjectives than nouns or action verbs, although these scripts contain a variety of non-mundane verbs. Nearly always there is at least one adverb in the script. Similes are beginning to appear.

Even in High scripts, one finds an occasional shift in verb tense or subject-verb/noun-pronoun disagreement.

A sense of audience is sometimes apparent. E.g., "Chapter One: Hello there. I have a wonderful story to tell you."

Impact on the Reader

Originality of idea
Clever twists

Low

This script generally describes the physical features of the creature and/or lists its actions. The story gives general information rather than developing a plot. The details are not well inter-related. The reader is left with a rather flat impression.

Low-Middle

A central idea is developed, although it lacks originality or cleverness. The reader can follow the general plot but is left with no particular impact.

Middle

The reader finds some appeal in part of the story; e.g., suspense, some clever details, but the appeal is not maintained throughout the story.

Middle-High

The reader finds specific appeal throughout most of the story, although the story has some weaknesses which interrupt the reader's attention; e.g., distracting detail, wandering from the main idea, ineffectively abrupt ending.

High

This script captures the reader throughout the entire reading. A main idea is well-developed, with supporting detail which provides continued focus. There is originality and/or cleverness, which creates a strong impact on the reader.

Punctuation, Capitals

*End Markers**
Commas
Apostrophes
Quotation Marks
Capitals

Low

This script generally has one-third to two-thirds of end markers omitted.

Question marks and exclamation marks are rarely used.

Commas are rarely used.

Apostrophes may be found, although they are often incorrectly used.

Quotation marks are rarely used.

Capitals are generally used to begin sentences, although some capitals are omitted. Capitals are sometimes unnecessarily used in common nouns.

Middle

This script contains more end markers than Low scripts. However, many scripts still lack some needed full stops. Question marks and exclamation marks are sometimes found, but used inconsistently throughout the story.

Commas are sometimes correctly used in series and less frequently in long introductory clauses, and are rarely used before dialogue.

Apostrophes are sometimes used correctly in contractions and singular possessives but rarely used correctly in plural possessives. Apostrophes are sometimes incorrectly used in simply plurals.

Capitals are usually used correctly and as needed. They are more likely to be omitted at the beginning of dialogue.

High

Even in a High script, a few end markers may be omitted. Question marks and exclamation marks are often correctly used, although not as consistently as full stops. Comma splices are more likely to occur in High scripts than in Middle or Low scripts.

Commas are often used correctly in a series but are not as prevalent in long introductory clauses. Commas are generally omitted before dialogue (e.g., "said,").

Apostrophes are generally used correctly in contractions but are less used in possessives.

Quotation marks are nearly always used, but they are not consistently correct.

Capitals are usually used correctly where needed and are not unnecessarily used.

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*Full stops, question marks, exclamation marks.

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Sentence Structure

Syntax
Sentence variety
Run-on sentences
Sentence fragments

Low

This script may show errors in syntax (grammatical arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses).

Sentence types are generally not varied. A Low script has more simple sentences than other types. However, in many cases, frequent lack of punctuation and an excessive use of coordinating conjunctions produce long, unclear sentences. A script less clearly written tends to have more compound-complex sentences and compound sentences, rather than complex sentences.

There are more run-on sentences than sentence fragments.

Middle

If syntactic errors occur, they are more likely to result from awkwardly written sentences; e.g., "So then he wanted to be a cowboy riding on a horse with two six-shooters."

This script is more clearly understood than the Low script even though up to one-fourth or one-third of the end markers are omitted. There are more simple sentences than other types. However, this script tends to have fewer compound sentences and more complex sentences than found in the Low script.

Comma splices may occur, causing run-on sentences, although they are not as frequent as in the High script.

There are more run-on sentences than sentence fragments.

High

This script has few, if any, errors in syntax.

The sentences are easily understood, despite some omitted punctuation. There are more simple sentences than other types. This script has fewer compound-complex sentences, with more complex sentences and compound sentences.

Some run-on sentences may be found by incorrect use of commas instead of full stops (commas splices). There are more comma splices than in Middle or Low scripts.

There are few sentence fragments; these are generally used correctly for effect.

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Spelling

Familiar patterns
Unfamiliar patterns
Homonyms
Affixes
Common memory
Invented

Low

This script may show severe to less-severe spelling difficulties.

Severe problems in spelling include letters out of sequence (e.g., "siad" for "said"). There may even be confusion between the letters p, q, b, d.

There is often a lack of correctly-used, familiar spelling patterns (e.g., "slips" for "sleeps," "saw" for "say," "shot" for "shoot.")

Suffixes are often omitted.

Less severe spelling difficulties include omission of double, final consonant before adding a suffix (e.g., "stoping" for "stopping.") Frequently letters are omitted (e.g., "jumed" for "jumped.")

Homonyms are often incorrect.

Common memory words may be misspelled (e.g., "eney" for "any.")

There are not many unusual words in the script; therefore, invented spelling may not be apparent.

Middle

Letters are generally not out of sequence other than in vowel combinations (e.g., "dreem" for "dream.") There is no confusion in letter form.

Affixes cause some spelling difficulties (e.g., "gradualy" for "gradually," "walkes" for "walks.")

Homonym spelling is often confused.

Compound words may be separated (e.g., "in to" for "into.")

Unfamiliar spelling patterns are not yet under control (e.g., ie-ei, ier-iar, er-ur-ir, c-s.)

There is some evidence of invented spelling but not as much as in High scripts.

High

Most spelling is correct.

Most frequent errors are in homonyms (especially, their/there/they're) and unfamiliar patterns (e.g., silent w, ie-ei, c-s.)

A high script is likely to show errors in high-risk (difficult) words by using invented spelling (e.g., "speichial" for "special.")

Handwriting

Legibility
Letter form
Letter size
Letter slope
Spacing
Alignment

Low

The most severe problem in handwriting is seen in incorrect letter form; however, even a low script generally shows correct letter form.

Legibility is hampered by any one or a combination of the following:

There may be some combination of printing, cursive, and link script. However, consistency in letter formation is usually present in the Low script.

Size of letters sometimes varies. Writing bordering on the immature generally shows large letters. Excessive space often exists between letters or between words. Occasionally writing may be cramped, with letters excessively close together.

Proper alignment (letters written on the line provided) is often marginal.

Middle

Legibility is generally not hampered, although the reader may have to closely examine a few words to identify the letters.

All letters are formed correctly.

Consistency in letter formation is usually present, with a definite style apparent. Letter size is generally uniform, although excessive or too little space between letters or words is sometimes found.

Alignment is satisfactory.

High

This script has none of the interferences described in the Low and Middle scripts.

All letters may not be perfectly written, but the reader is not hampered due to the quality of the handwriting.

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Acknowledgements

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Sincere appreciation is given to the principals, teachers, and children of the 51 state and private schools who so fully co-operated in this study.

The teachers who assessed the hundreds of scripts devoted many days of concentrated energy. They have my deep admiration and appreciation.

A large share of thanks is due to the many children who wrote their stories, providing reasons and substance for this research.

Note

Carol Adler is at present teaching children with special needs from 302 East Beckwith, Missoula, Montana, USA, 59801.

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THE BEST OF SET Writing

Learning and Teaching Writing

The IEA Written Composition Study

By Hilary Lamb

NZ Department of Education

The Study

IN 1984, in one hundred Form 2 (Year 7) classes and in one hundred Form 5 (Year 10) classes throughout New Zealand, six thousand children wrote three pieces each. Their work was collected and the 18,000 pieces analytically marked according to internationally agreed criteria. Now the results are known. Not all the international results and comparisons from the other 13 countries and systems are available. It would be good to know 'how well New Zealand scored', but there are dangers in that – international surveys are sometimes treated as academic Olympics. However, some generalisations can be made and we can draw out consequent implications for teaching writing.

Letters

Three tasks involved writing friendly letters. The best writers combined a fluent command of the required familial or friendly tone with descriptive ability and precise language choice. Where writers used intrusive or irrelevant material, vague and partial information or pedestrian language, they did not score well. Recall, selecting material and producing an ordered sequence were also required, and on these tasks students were clearly good or bad.

Two formal letters were called for and gave the writers fewer problems, possibly because of the clear directions for content. In the Netherlands and England scores were also high in this task. In New Zealand the letter to the Principal was the top-scoring task for Form 5 students, with 81% of students gaining a grade of 3 or better. It may be that students were able to visualise their principal as the specific audience for the letter, with the result that a formal, courteous style and tone was observed. It was a feature of low-scoring scripts that an inappropriately colloquial informal tone was used. This informal register was also seen in scripts by Form 2 students in New Zealand, but whether this was a lack of familiarity with the conventions of formal messages or because they saw their principals as approachable friendly adults, is not clear.

When writing the other formal letter, an application for a summer job, some students found it difficult to imagine the audience and the recipient's point of view. Perhaps this was because the audience was someone unknown – a personnel manager. In the English and American samples, this task created problems for a large number of students. Some found the level of formality difficult, so that a serious and distant tone at times became pompous or clumsy. In New Zealand, however, 72% of students gained a grade of 3 or more in this task.

Stories

The *narrative* task was to write on an episode that could have happened to you. The dimensions of content, organisation and style were revealed as closely interdependent. Competent writers generated and selected appropriate content, successfully handled the chronology of the episode, were aware of the reader, understood that one purpose of this task was to entertain, and so controlled the form and style of story-telling.

Students who drew on their own experience produced lively, fresh essays. The better narratives showed an honesty of perception, a freshness of voice and sometimes a sense of humour. Such features were usually lacking in plots culled from television programmes, comics, films or popular teenage fiction.

The difference between high and low achieving writers was apparent in the sense of audience. Although the audience for the narrative was an unspecific 'reader' (unlike the functional letter tasks), better writers showed an understanding that for every story-teller there is a listener. They used many techniques to involve and manipulate the reactions of the reader: deliberate constructions for denouement; surprise endings; delayed action; conversation and internal monologue; the colloquial style of a raconteur; deliberately heightened and expressive vocabulary; and variation in sentence structures. Introductions showed varying degrees of sophistication, and often dictated the structure and tone which followed. The most common opening by New Zealanders was a descriptive paragraph, the establishment shot common in film, as a physical, emotional or historical context for the story. There was also evidence in introductions (and conclusions) of reflection on the episode, and adjustments by the writer to the point of view of the audience. Other opening strategies included varied chronology, such as flashbacks, the narrative framework of a story within a story, immediate action often using dialogue, and even the occasional classical technique of beginning 'in media res', in the middle of the action.

Not all experimentation was entirely successful. Weaknesses in planning led some students to emphasise the detailed time-consuming list of domestic detail or minor events, the heart of the story was added hurriedly at the end.

This narrative writing was the highest scoring essay-style task in New Zealand for Form 5 (Year 10) although the formal letters proved least difficult overall. The Netherland's report comments that real quality was rare in their stories but for the British the narrative was the least difficult task.

Argument

The writers were also asked to produce a *persuasive* or *argumentative* essay. This was to be on any problem or issue about which they felt strongly. Each writer was required to generate the content, including illustrations or incidents as supporting material, and to organise this material logically and systematically in order to persuade the audience to share that point of view. The writer could take the stance of an adversary, or give a balanced perspective.

The choice of problems was wide-ranging, from egocentric concerns to global issues. Some of those who wrote on general ethical problems had little to say beyond half-understood, regurgitated views, but mature writers with a genuine interest in the topic usually produced high-scoring scripts. Not all high scores were on these wider topics; some on personal and family problems were equally high. The use of minor issues sometimes led to problems in generating enough material, and less able writers penalised themselves by selecting subjects with limited breadth of content.

Deep feeling and seriousness did not necessarily result in high achievement. Vehement style could become a tirade, lacking in logic and, at least in New Zealand, depending on peremptory rhetorical questions and insistent statements. A balance between forthright views and persuasive style was difficult to maintain, and the registers shifted from formal to colloquial. In these essays, a bald description of a problem, or the blunt declaration that there was a problem replaced argumentation, logic or persuasion. Repetition or even listing of ideas were substitutes for emphasis or supporting arguments, links between ideas were tenuous. Limited language choice and sentence structures reflected the vague or limited ideas, and the spoken mode was intrusive.

Those who were confident in the genre knew their topic, and pleaded their case. They defined the issues, took a clear stance, recognised and rebutted counter arguments.

Their framework for persuasion varied from the traditional rhetorical style to include narrative of a relevant incident, or a formal debating style.

Reflecting

The reflective essay, Task 7, was the most academic and the most difficult of all the tasks. The essay, as a literary form, might be described as a process by which writers clarify their thinking. At its best it offers new perception and understanding through association, comparison, evaluation and exposition. It involves the writer in a subtle balancing act – sustaining a personal view while acknowledging the opinions of others. The focus is on the topic, rather than the writer or the reader.

In this study students were asked to philosophise a little on a topic chosen from six areas of broad human concern. These ranged from the relatively familiar such as television, or the generation gap, to the more abstract, such as loneliness or the power of possessions. Not many students at this level had the maturity of reasoning or broad general knowledge necessary to distance themselves from strident argument or mere personal anecdote. High quality scripts stated a clear position, drew inferences, and acknowledged implications of, or alternatives to, such a position. They were rewarded for developing reasoning and analysis to support their stance, for clear and varied structures of organisation, especially transitions, introductions and conclusions, for a range of sentence structures, and for concise and often original expression.

In low-scoring scripts the wider perspectives suggested by the topics were usually not recognised. Argumentation took the form of simple personal statements unsupported by examples, or of stereotypes or irrelevant digressions. For instance, the content of low-scoring New Zealand essays on the television topic sometimes contained little more than a catalogue of favourite programmes. These writers could not read beyond the literal meaning of the starter material, and lacked logic and reasoning. They had problems with the cognitive level of analytical processing required. In New Zealand, students at 15 would not have been very familiar with this type of writing. Students in this group also failed to perceive the need for a different style and tone from the argumentative/persuasive task, and sometimes used oratorical or spoken forms of expression.

Implications

Depth, Content Familiarity

ALREADY some of the implications for classroom practice will be apparent. The students' writing performance varied substantially depending on how familiar the student was with the task. The analyses of the New Zealand results points to the importance of students feeling in control of their material for high performance. Accuracy in the mechanics of spelling, grammar and usage went with the student's confidence. Where the writer knew what he or she wanted to say the mechanics of spelling, grammar, and appropriate diction were more often correct. Where the writer was struggling with ideas and content the mechanics got worse too.

Maturity

More complex tasks such as argumentative or reflective writing may be beyond the majority of students at this stage (12 years and 15 years) demanding a level of cognitive development which many students do not reach until aged 16 or more. When Form 2 and Form 5 (Years 7 and 10) students attempted these tasks their writing deteriorated in many ways and in effect they regressed to a lower level of mechanical accuracy, vocabulary use and sentence structure.

Early findings from some of the other countries reveal the same patterns and suggest that acquiring the skills necessary for argumentative or reflective writing comes only with the maturity of the writer and is not because of deficiencies in any teaching programme. Students in secondary schools must cope with increasingly large amounts of complex material to read and translate into notes. This material may later have to be turned into 'literary' or 'academic' essays and students have little experience or formal training in this skill. Such writing has specialised patterns and may require new strategies for reading, and for the teaching of writing.

Preparation

This study points to the worth of classroom discussion for providing context and background for students before they attempt expository or persuasive writing. Just as students make more sense of what they are reading if they know the context and background of the test, so too they write better if they have access to a broad range of content. Younger students may also need help in defining the topic and choosing elements for examples, illustration and counter-argument in persuasive and expository writing.

There is also strong evidence of the value of reading as a factor in writing performance. This was seen especially in the fluency and familiarity of students with the variety of structures and styles in narrative writing.

More revelations

Girls

A CONSISTENT finding which emerges is the higher achievement of girls. It is hard to say why girls perform better in writing. The subjects they choose to take at school may allow them more practice in extensive written activity because it is quiet individual work. The topics teachers choose for writing, especially at secondary school, may suggest to boys that writing is a feminine occupation. There may be a difference in maturation: at 15 girls are keen to analyse and put a point of view while boys prefer story writing on fantasy topics, the same topics preferred by 12-year-old boys. Nevertheless, the best examples of narrative and expository writing still included boys' scripts.

Some constraints

All the scripts analysed were first drafts, written under test conditions without preparation or time for much revision and editing. This was in contrast to the modern classroom practice of allowing students to work and rework their texts. A few schools declined to take part in the study because of this emphasis on judging product and first draft writing which was opposed to their school's practice of concentrating on the *processes* of writing. Students mentioned planning and revision as important aspects of processing their ideas when writing and the lack of time for these must be seen as a constraint on the writing done for this study.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

Spelling error rates in this study show that there has actually been a slight increase in accuracy since Nicholson's survey in 1970. Moreover the IEA measures are conservative, giving high error rates. Counted as mistakes are slips of the pen; and inconsistencies in spelling, grammar or punctuation where students correctly spelt a word in one line and yet make a mistake several lines further on. Under 'normal' writing conditions these mistakes might disappear, given revision and the reworking of compositions.

Standards

Comments in the media about standards of writing often concentrate only on surface errors of spelling and grammar. They ignore such things as the level of cognitive difficulty of the writing task, the quality and scope of ideas, diversity of language choice, complexity of linguistic structures, or the organisation of the content. Any measure of spelling, grammar or punctuation must take account of the breadth of vocabulary used as well as other dimensions of writing. Students who make few errors may in fact be using extremely simple linguistic structures and vocabulary whereas inaccurate spellers may be inventing spelling in order to use more expressive language which is just beyond their learned written vocabulary. It would be harsh to penalise creativity in an effort to enforce correctness.

Children's Advice

Secondary analysis of one of the friendly letters provided a picture of what students knew and thought about school writing, and the values they placed on different aspects of writing.

The most frequently given advice was on neatness of presentation, correct spelling and punctuation i.e., on surface features of writing. New Zealand children ranked content second, with comments such as 'be original' and 'keep to the topic'. The better writers had more of value to say than poorer writers, who tended to list five surface features. This result is true in most other countries too. The British report suggests that poor writers are bewildered, wonder what might constitute good writing, and look for quite separate factors, such as behaving well in class as the way to achieve good marks.

Their responses do suggest that we need to communicate our criteria very clearly. Knowledge about writing precedes the power to write, so we must also teach an awareness of the processes of writing. But even when students know the ideal, they cannot always put it into practice – comparing the advice they gave with their scores confirmed that knowing *about* is not always knowing *how*. An explanation of the dimensions of each task (as outlined in an analytical marking scheme) may help students to understand more clearly what is expected of them, when they are given the writing assignments, and not after the work is returned to them.

Matching Techniques and Goals

THERE seems to be some discrepancy between the teachers' stated aims (usually developmental and pragmatic goals) and the activities used to teach writing in the classrooms. Much of the writing in classrooms, across the curriculum, is copying, not composing text. This recital of material organised by someone else may provide models of writing. But opportunities for students to assemble, order and process their own ideas are needed.

Students, from Form 2 (Year 7) on, write more and more; they need a far greater range of writing activities which involve a variety of audiences and styles, beyond narratives and letters, and they need to be taught organisation skills. Perhaps we need *more* scrutiny of *less* writing.

Writing to Think

With revising and monitoring one's own work comes the skill of using writing to think and analyse, to solve problems with strategies, to assess one's own knowledge and extend it. At this point we are writing to learn. Other familiar activities are efficient and enjoyable but research in America and in New Zealand shows that the writing tasks students are given do not require them to think deeply enough.

To improve the teaching of writing is to improve the quality of thinking, the higher order thinking skills of students. It is to help students communicate ideas, learn new information and solve problems.

This IEA study, and David Phillips' study of writing in four classrooms (see *set* 1986, No. 1, item 12) have revealed a lack of variety in teaching programmes, even within the practice of 'process writing'. It is a feature which is not specific to New Zealand classrooms. The recent report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in America says:

> The results . . . suggest that American schools have been successful at teaching students to formulate quick and short interpretations, but they have not yet developed in students the skills they need to explain and defend the judgements they make. The end result is an emphasis on shallow and superficial opinions at the expense of reasoned and disciplined thought . . .

Judith Langer, one of the authors of the NAEP survey, claims that *activities do not create purpose*. Rather, in the successful classroom, *purpose creates activities*, and shapes the ways in which they are carried out. Where writing is used as evaluation, the audience is still the teacher, the content is a replication of the teacher or the text, and evaluation is through grading. Where writing is used for thinking, it is for the students themselves, it encourages experiment and exploration, the writing process becomes the learning process, the language is the students' own language. Grading and assessment may be delayed, but will be more revealing.

As Judith Langer observed in successful classrooms: where writing has a clear purpose, it works to prepare for new learning and to access knowledge; to review knowledge and draw new learning together; to find out what is not yet understood, and to extend and rethink knowledge, to relate it to a new context. New activities, such as journals, writing logs, planning and pre-writing activities, peer conferencing, have been enthusiastically taken up, but often incorporated into old purposes. The goals have not changed. Students are still writing to please the teacher, rather than to think deeply.

We need to take every opportunity to explore and explain what we are doing and why and to celebrate the good things that are happening in our classrooms. The IEA Written Composition Study is a start.

Notes

Hilary Lamb, now the Principal of Queen Margaret College, 53 Hobson St, Wellington, was national research co-ordinator for the IEA Written Composition Study when this report was prepared.

The NAEP survey report is

Applebee, Arthur and Langer, Judith, *Writing Report Card* (1987) Washington D.C.: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

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Taking Care of the Elements

Assessment of Writing Performance, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, in South Australia

By Claire Woods
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Background

IN South Australia the performance of school pupils as readers and writers in Years 6 and 10 (New Zealand Forms 1 and 5) is being assessed in the *Writing and Reading Assessment Project (WRAP)*. An interim report has been released and a final report is being prepared. WRAP is perhaps the most comprehensive and detailed curriculum monitoring and student assessment project undertaken in Australia to date. The focus of this ***set*** item is on the first results of the survey of writing.

The project became very much a co-operative effort between the education systems (State, Catholic and Independent) and the main teacher-education institution; it has involved a wide range of schools, teachers, researchers, curriculum writers, advisers, subject consultants, and teacher educators.

The decision was made early in the planning, consistent with practice in South Australia, to develop this programme without relying on standardised and norm-referenced testing procedures.

The development team was firm that the form of assessment must support literacy and language learning and teaching; it must ensure that teachers were provided with the tools for appraising learning and for reporting progress with confidence. To this end WRAP was designed with three interlinked strands: the Survey proper; teacher professional development; information dissemination. This item concentrates on the Survey. In developing the Survey tasks the team drew on other research as much as on local practice. The work of the Assessment of Performance Unit at the National Foundation for Educational Research (England and Wales) and of the Scottish Council for Research in Education was particularly helpful.

The Survey

The Survey aims to provide information about
(1) the range, kinds, and frequency of writing and reading done in subjects across the curriculum;
(2) performance in specific writing and reading tasks;
(3) students' perceptions of themselves as readers and writers and their attitudes to reading and writing at school.

The sample

The sampling design was prepared by Malcolm Rosier of ACER's Survey and Analysis Services Unit. It is a stratified random sample of students in Year 6 and Year 10 classes in ordinary schools with enrolments in both primary and secondary of more than 100. Schools were drawn proportionally from all education sectors, Education Department, Catholic and Independent schools. Students from 32 Primary and 29 Secondary were involved in the survey in 1989. Further data were gathered in 1990 and supplementary data are being gathered in 1991. The Interim Report is based on the 1989 data.

From each school, two classes were selected at Year 6 and two at Year 10. For specific purpose analysis four students from each of the classes were chosen at random. The work of additional special interest students was also analysed.

There were separate survey procedures for specific student groups not necessarily fully represented in the sample; Aboriginal students, those in Special Schools for students with disabilities, students from non-English-speaking-backgrounds, and children in poverty.

Curriculum Monitoring

First came gathering information about the kinds of writing and reading the students did in all their subjects over a four-week period.

Writing

The students were given folders in which to keep all their written work over a four-week period in Term 3 of 1989. From these four weeks, two weeks were randomly selected. The class teachers were asked to fill in detailed class-by-class curriculum activity sheets in which they noted their aims, resources used, time spent on tasks, expectations, assignments set, and so on. This contextual information was a necessary component in the analysis of the student work.

Two questions drove this part of the Survey: What range of writing activities are students experiencing in schools? What other aspects of writing, such as processes, levels of

complexity and purposes are evident and significant in classroom writing?

Findings

Length

The children wrote whilst doing many different tasks in many different subjects. In Year 6 (Form 1) their writing averaged less than a page in length. In Year 10 (Form 5), the average was a page and a quarter.

Forms

In all subjects the dominant form was *exercises* (49%) followed by *original writing* (26%). The range of original writing is extensive; including essays, descriptions, instructions, invitations, reports, scripts, stories, learning logs, and letters. There were also 'transformations' in which students in some way transform other writing into a different form, for example, making summaries, diagrams, charts and posters. If these are added to the original writing, then students can be seen to be writing with some degree of originality 40% of the time. Copying of some kind occurred in 11% of the writing.

Exercises were particularly noticeable in Language Arts, where despite 27% of the writing being original, and 6% transformational, exercises (spelling, vocabulary, comprehension, grammar) comprise 59% of writing. Similarly in Languages Other Than English (LOTE) , exercises play a major part (73%) in student writing. Year 10 students were also engaged in writing exercises more than any other form (36%). Original writing was 28% of the total and to this might be added transformations (13%) to get some indication of how much writing demanded originality in some way from students (41%). The figures are remarkably similar across the year levels. Original writing was the dominant form in the Language subjects (48%).

Reproductions (copied text, copied notes, typing exercises, etc.) account for 22% of writing at Year 10: a significantly higher figure than in Year 6.

Complexity

In Year 6, there is little writing that demands students write in extended prose (8%). Written responses are usually just a single word (35%) or separate sentences (30%) or connected sentences (17%). Even in subjects where it might be expected that students write at length, Language Arts and Social Education, they write primarily single word or short answers (e.g., Language Arts, 70% of work).

Year 10 students write longer sentences, and more connected sentences or paragraphs in all subjects. However, separate sentences still dominate (37%), rather than longer pieces of writing. Connected sentences and extended prose account for 29% of all writing. The Language areas (English and LOTE) and the Arts contain significant amounts of extended prose (32% and 37%). In Science, however, the major form of written response is in separate sentences (49%). Only 4% of writing in Science is in extended prose.

Authorship

Year 6 students write primarily in their own words (43%); Year 10 students also (46%). When the figures for Maths are removed, this is 51% in Year 10. In Year 6, 29% of writing is copying; in Year 10 it is 22%.

Status

One-off writing is dominant in both Year 6 (86%) and Year 10 (88%). Very little work at either year level suggests that drafting and revising writing is common practice. This is an interesting finding particularly as schools in their curriculum documents say they are emphasising the importance of drafting, revising, and editing, leading to a polished final product.

Print style

Both Year 6 and Year 10 students prefer to use print (52% and 67%) rather than linked (cursive) script (37% and 20%). This is a curious finding. Do they prefer to print because they think print looks neater? Very little work at either year level is word processed.

Audience

The dominant audience is the teacher, at both levels. Implied audiences of any kind are rarely used as a focus for writing. However, at both year levels, writing for oneself occupies a substantial place.

Choice

Students are given little choice in what and how they write. In Year 6, 67%, and Year 10, 76% of the writing is chosen by the teacher.

Purpose

The purpose for writing in Year 6 is predominantly to display knowledge (29%), to demonstrate understanding (13%), consolidate knowledge (4%), or practise skills (12%). And while some subjects, such as Language Arts, expect students to use writing for a wide range of purposes (e.g., reflecting, questioning, clarifying, entertaining, asserting, giving an opinion), most writing is for limited purposes. While the results are not very different in Year 10, there is a slight increase in the use of writing to explore/interpret and record ideas.

Function

Writing in all subjects in Year 6 is primarily a tool for thinking and managing complex tasks and to demonstrate knowledge, skill or understanding. There is relatively little use of writing for social action, personal exploration, or as an aesthetic experience.

The figures are similar in Year 10 where, almost 90% of writing is used for only two of the function categories, (a) as a learning tool, (b) to demonstrate knowledge, skills or understanding.

Conclusions

While a wide range of writing is undertaken in most subjects the purposes and functions for writing are in general limited. Students are not expected to draft and revise or indeed write at length, write for a wide range of audiences (either real or implied) or engage in the kind of writing which calls forth complex thinking, reflecting or analytic skills. The report says:

> The challenge for teachers is to ensure that students use writing not only as a means of consolidating and demonstrating knowledge but more often as a means of calling into play the full potential of their intelligence through creative, critical or exploratory discourse.

Table 1
Year 6. Percentages of writing across the curriculum

	Language Arts	Mathematics	Social Education	Science	Languages Other Than English	ALL (excluding Maths)	ALL
personal exploration	5.4	0.5	4.4	0	0	4.7	4.0
learning tool	25.9	39.7	42.7	54.7	54.0	32.3	33.6
social action	4.2	0.2	6.1	0	1.6	4.4	3.7
aesthetic	16.5	0	2.2	1.6	6.3	11.8	9.7
demonstrate knowledge/ skill/understanding	47.7	59.4	44.2	43.0	38.1	46.4	48.7
unrecorded	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.8	0	0.4	0.4

Performance

The children were asked to:
(a) write, reflecting on themselves as writers (the 'Me as a writer' task);
(b) write a science report after observing, recording observations, planning and designing a specific item;
(c) write an autobiographical piece;
(d) write a story;
(e) write a persuasive piece involving collecting information, planning, organising, drafting and preparing a written argument.

Only (a) has been marked and analysed so far, and these results have appeared in the interim report.

Writing analysis

Writing was analysed in two ways.
(1) The *Immediate Response Score* is an impressionistic or holistic score; a score which reflects the reader/assessor's immediate reaction to the piece of writing as a whole. Each paper was marked independently by two trained teacher scorers. A supervising scorer from the project team scored independently when there was any major discrepancy. After scoring, all papers were sorted into the respective scoring bands and further scrutiny by supervising project officers ensured that papers in each band were consistent.
(2) The *Analytic Score* isolates specific aspects of the text for scoring. The WRAP team investigated and trialled scoring schemes used in other writing assessment research and devised an analytic scoring scheme which focused on the categories:
ideas/information;
organisation;
language appropriateness and style;
conventions (including spelling, punctuation, syntax/grammar).

Spelling, being of great interest to the general public, was also treated separately. Each piece of writing was scored, again, according to the categories.

Reading and writing

As well as the specific writing tasks, two reading tasks (not reported here) resulted in writing. Whilst reading fiction the children were asked to keep a reading log of interesting or noteworthy points. At the end they were asked to write a letter to the WRAP team in which they responded to what they had read, including such information as whether they would recommend the story to others, their reaction to events, characters, ideas in the story, and so on. These letters were analysed as pieces of writing, using both scoring methods.

Whilst reading non-fiction the students were asked to fill in a special booklet with notes on what they already knew about the topic, to predict information, and then, having read the text as many times as they wished, they were asked to put the text away and retell the information. To analyse the retelling the project team first checked the non-fiction text the teacher had given the children for the number of main points, number of supporting details, and total number of words. Each student's retelling was then analysed, alongside the text, for main points, supporting detail, points or details wrongly included, points drawn from previous knowledge or not provided in the text.

Results

Overall performance

The *Immediate Response* scale showed that the majority of students (at both 11 and 15) were in the three categories:
Very Satisfactory in Most Areas;
Satisfactory in Most Areas;
Satisfactory in Some Areas.

The percentages of children judged satisfactory in most areas, or better, were 63% in Year 6 (Form 1), 56% in Year 10 (Form 5).

After the second, *Analytic*, scoring the project team sorted all the writing into bands according to the categories. Thus, for example, one piece of writing might score high for ideas and information but low for the conventions - punctuation, spelling, etc. The WRAP team was then able to comment in detail on the particular skill at each band level, and to extract exemplars to demonstrate particular features of the writing. The report concludes:

> . . . in the higher bands there was evidence that students could engage in the complexities of higher order thinking skills: comparing, contrasting, speculating, assessing alternatives, and so on.

Spelling

Spelling was targeted for particular analysis in both 'Me as a writer' and the retelling of a non-fiction text. In both, Year 6 students' performance was high – most achieved more than 95% accuracy. These students demonstrated:

> ...considerable control over the conventions of punctuation, capitalisation and basic grammar.

The report finding is:

> There were few examples of prose that was sufficiently inaccurate for the message to be distorted or unclear, in any score band.

In Year 10, spelling in the 'Me as a writer' task was generally handled competently. The majority were 98% accurate and fewer than 1% of the students had less than 90% accuracy. This applies even in the lower score bands. The report concludes:

> There were strong aspects in all features of writing and positive comments can be made about the performance of the students in all score bands.

Problems

Nevertheless, there were problems in other areas. That most children were only *Satisfactory* overall suggests the need for young writers to give more attention to ideas, to elaborate them and organise their writing into coherent and cohesive pieces. The report says:

> Lack of organisation and limited development of ideas were the biggest factors in students not completing this task satisfactorily.

The Survey Conclusions Thus Far

The curriculum monitoring part of the Survey revealed the huge range and diversity of reading and writing tasks in all subjects that students are asked to attempt in a two-week period. It has reinforced that activities are complex and that the skills, knowledge and processes needed by students, to be successful, are equally complex.

However, the Survey revealed that much of the writing was short in length and demonstrated that little time was spent on revision and reflection. There was little evidence of any particularly significant effort to engage students in writing for a *wide* range of purposes. The purposes for which writing was used were essentially limited to exercises and reproduction tasks (copying, etc.). Few writing tasks were in extended prose and there was a clear lack of writing for social action, aesthetic or personal reasons. At both year levels the survey found that students have:

> ...an adequate control over basic conventions and language skills.

Yet the report suggests that students need to develop the skills for cohesive and extended pieces of writing, focusing on ideas and information, elaborating ideas, and shaping them appropriately for a purpose. The report also commented that:

> Many students, particularly at the secondary level, demonstrated some difficulty in writing about themselves in a personal reflective mode. However, there was evidence that the more successful students were prepared to use a variety of syntactic and rhetorical devices to get their ideas across and engaged in a range of higher order thinking skills in making connections and exploring their ideas.

The challenge for teachers would seem to be to provide in all subjects, for all students, writing activities which demand the use of higher order thinking skills, constructing extended pieces of writing, in which ideas and information (including expressions of arguments or points of view) are focused and elaborated.

Commentary

Teachers need to take the high ground in community debates about literacy and literacy achievement, rather than being caught constantly on the defensive. The assessment procedures teachers use should reveal the complexity of language and literacy development. This is what teachers recognise in the day-to-day work with children.

We should provide assessments that describe students' achievements in the richest manner possible. Furthermore, describing and examining the curriculum (as a context for achievement) in detail, should be part of the way the teaching profession constructs public expectations about literacy. Thus public expectation and knowledge of schools and students should be built on the basis of a rich portrait of what is actually occurring in the classroom.

Notes

Dr Claire Woods was Superintendent of Curriculum, English Language Arts and Literacy R-12, Education Department of South Australia. When the WRAP project began in 1989 she was its first Manager and Director. She continues as Senior Consultant to the project. She is now Principal Lecturer, Language and Communications Studies, University of South Australia, North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia 5000.

Mr Alan Laslett, c/o Writing and Assessment Project, Ingle Farm Curriculum Unit, Darrang Avenue, Ingle Farm, South Australia 5098, is the current Project Co-ordinator.

The interim report is

> Writing and Reading Assessment Project Team (1991) *Writing and Reading Assessment Program - Interim Report*, Education Department of South Australia.

The quotations (indented) are all from the interim report.

For those interested in the overseas work on assessing writing (and reading) see

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